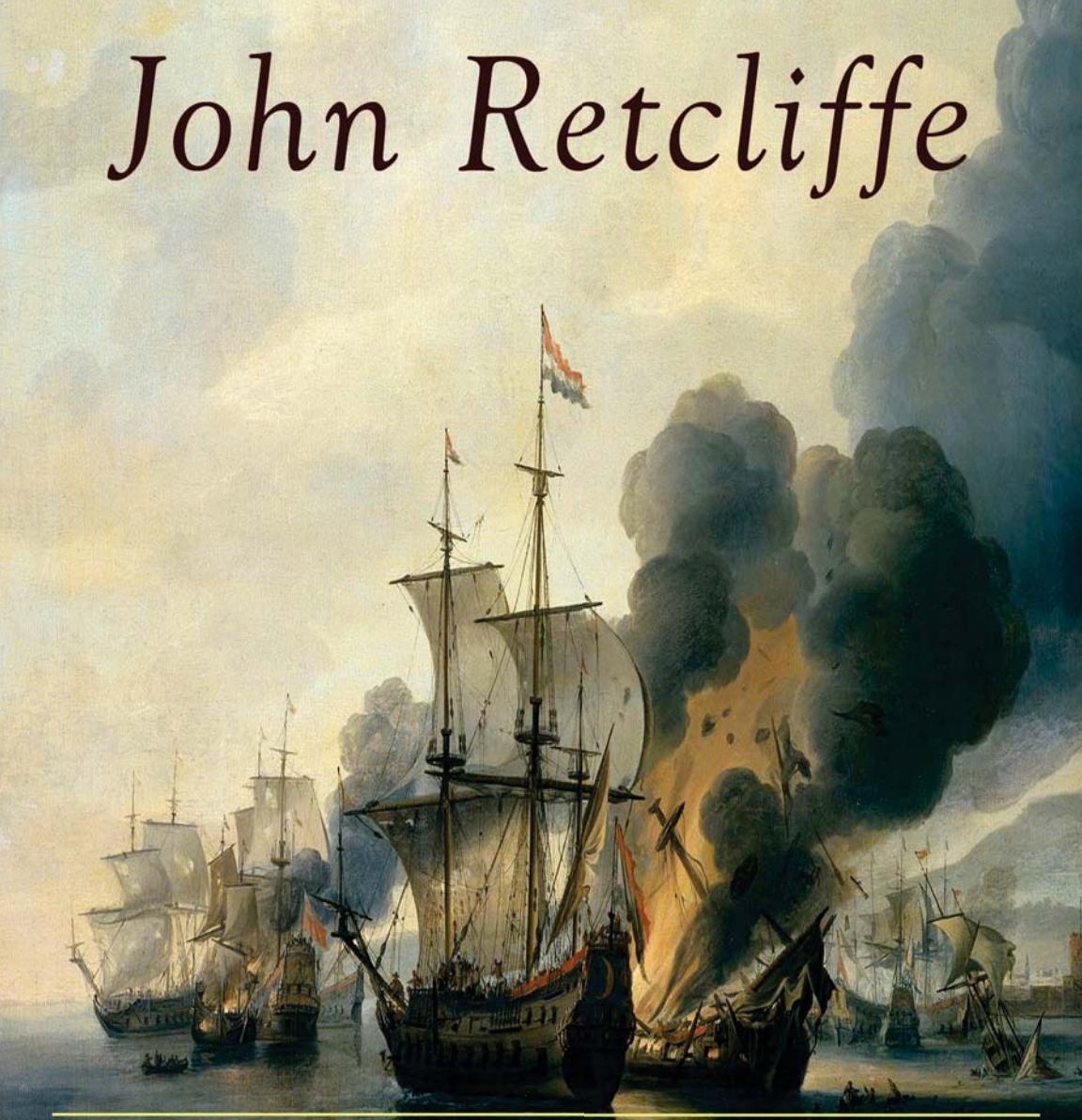
John Retcliffe



BIARRITZ

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BOOKS

Biarritz.

By

Sir John Retcliffe.

(Author of the novel *Sebastopol*.)

Part One: Gaeta – Warsaw – Düppel.

Volume One.

Masks off!

Protest.

The author of this book has written several novels since 1856 under the pseudonym he chose for himself, ‘Sir John Retcliffe’. These novels are:

‘Sebastopol’,
‘Nena Sahib’,
‘Villafranca’
(“Ten Years”
‘Magenta’ and
‘Solferino’)

and finally

‘Puebla’.

The fact that the genre he chose – the depiction of contemporary history in the guise of a novel – has met with approval and been imitated can only please him. He might, however, have hoped for enough decency and respect for the law amongst German writers and booksellers to ensure that the pseudonym he chose would not also become the subject of speculation.

This expectation proved to be misplaced. Not only have various novels been published since then under the same pseudonym, but attempts have even been made to continue one *of his* books (Villafranca) under the same author’s name.

The pseudonymous writer is powerless against such speculation; he can only protest against any confusion amongst his readership.

On behalf of the author, the publishing house hereby does so by declaring that **only** the books listed above originate from the author of the novel ‘Sebastopol’, and that the author hereby rejects any connection to other works—published to date or yet to be published—which misuse or imitate his pseudonym and often pursue a completely different agenda.

Berlin, March 1868.

The publishing house of
C. S. Liebrecht.

[9]

CASTELFIDARDO!

One of the most infamous political acts of modern times, a breach of international law such as had been seen only in the most flagrant arbitrariness of the First Napoleon, had been committed: the invasion by the Sardinian army, without any cause and without a declaration of war, of the Papal States – that is to say, the small portion that had remained to the Head of the Catholic Church following the war and the revolutions of 1859. –

The whole of Italy was in a state of wild agitation. The revolution, under the protection of the royal purple and clad in the red shirt, was triumphant everywhere. Count Cavour had skilfully and successfully squandered the Sardinian millions and, under the pretence of a plebiscite, sold off Nice and Savoy to the great speculator in popular sovereignty and *glory*! – The secret visit to Chambéry on 16 September had orchestrated the farce and paid the price for the Orsini change: 'Free as far as the Adriatic!' The Great League of the Revolution was
[10]
instructed, by *full powers* from Naples and Warsaw, to undertake an action that allowed the Parisian Kaiserthum to consolidate its power in peace; and for the army, until the great question of the 'revendication' or the 'natural borders' of the old Napoleonic Empire on the Rhine could be negotiated, a less than honourable task in the defeat of the long-haired men at Peyho and in the expedition to Syria to force Fuad Pasha to behead two hundred devout Muslims as compensation for the fifty thousand Christians murdered in Lebanon and Damascus!

Since the year 1848, scarcely any year had been as rich in various bloody and political events as the year 1860. Spain had triumphed at Tetouan and in Morocco, and the audacious Ortega's mad coup in favour of the fallen Bourbons—unworthy of their father—had been repaid with Christian bullets in Tortosa on 22 April.

The agreement reached by the German princes in Baden-Baden (18 June) was thwarted by the dramatic appearance of the French Emperor; in the north, Danish arrogance disturbed even the sleepyheads of the German Federal Assembly from their slumber; England held parades of its militias against a French landing; Prussia began the monumental task of reorganising its army, and the Regent sent his field marshal to Kassel to settle the constitutional turmoil; Austria established its Imperial Council and had its generals and ministers beheaded as atonement for the deceptions in
[11]
Lombardian campaigns; Russia forgot the sins of Vienna, and the Emperor of Japan and the Prince of Montenegro were, for the time being, assassinated. In America, the bloody Civil War was brewing, and even little Switzerland beat the drums of war against French ambitions, whilst in Central and Northern Germany the National Association established a second government within the state.

The scene of the main tragedy was Italy. Whatever disgrace, breach of trust, treachery and wretchedness any country had ever been guilty of was surpassed here within the brief span of a single year. The wretchedness of the governments rivalled the venality of those they governed.

Is it any wonder that the revolution found open doors and hearts everywhere? It would scarcely have done any harm for its hurricane to clear the air, had it not been for the dynastic scheming lurking in the background, which turned that beautiful country and its honourable champion into a pawn in the game between Mazzinianism, Piedmontese ambitions for great power, and Napoleonic politics!

Publicly disavowed by the Sardinian government with the utmost shamelessness, yet secretly supported, *Garibaldi*—the pioneer of the future Kingdom of Italy, the enthusiastic and daring champion of Italian national independence and freedom, the hero of Rome and the Sardinian general of Como and Varese—still bitter over the sell-out of his birthplace! – to Sicily, landing at Marsala on 11 May under the protection of British corvettes, a nation that loves to promote freedom everywhere, with the exception of its
[12]
own countries. By the 27th, he had entered Palermo with his small force and, aided by the pitiful cowardice and treachery within the Royalist camp, had conquered Sicily within two months – for whom? He himself scarcely knew, but Count Cavour had left him in no doubt about it.

On 9 September, the vanguard of the Red Shirts under Major Missori had been ferried across to the mainland; on the 19th, Garibaldi followed to Reggio and advanced towards Naples. His march there was a succession of shameful acts of treachery and of cowardice and disloyalty on the part of the Royalist troops, such as – to the credit of the military reputation! – have never before stained the history of any nation – with the exception of the Scottish nation in the betrayal of Charles Stuart!

We shall have occasion to return to this in more detail later.

Whatever sins and evidence of incompetence the Bourbons of modern times may have been guilty of whilst occupying the various thrones they held – the breach of loyalty by the vast majority of the Neapolitan army against its young king, the treachery of his closest relatives and servants, – the long-prepared intrigue of the Piedmontese court, aimed not at the welfare of the nation but at the acquisition of new territory and the expansion of power, no righteous heart will condone, and history will later – once those flickering fires of political passions have died down – pass true judgement upon it.
[13]

It is our task to describe this struggle as well, and how it forms part of the momentous history of our time.

We have already mentioned above that, apart from Rome and the Campagna, the Pope’s only remaining secular territories were the provinces of Umbria and the Marches. Even if not Pius IX himself – a man of kind and benevolent heart – the statesmen of the Holy See, above all *Cardinal Antonelli*, the Secretary of State, possessed sufficient foresight to realise that Cavour’s policy was not content to be satisfied with the plunder and annexation of the Legations, and that revolution was being constantly fomented within the Papal States.

It was well known that the papal government was no match for an external attack—that is, war with a greater power. In this regard, it had to rely on the

protection of a great power, and faced the perilous choice between France and Austria. The latter had withdrawn its garrisons from the legations during the campaign of 1859 – France, on the other hand, had kept Rome and Civitavecchia occupied; – what choice, then, remained but to entrust itself to French protection, whatever the risk? But Emperor Napoleon understood how to reconcile his domestic peace – that is, the protection of Rome – with his concessions to the Italian Revolution, and contented himself, for that purpose, with keeping the unrest in Rome and its surrounding countryside in check. The task of securing the rest of the territory against internal rebellion and attacks by guerrilla forces was to be left to the papal government itself and its troops.
[14]

However, the papal military was in such a pitiful state that it would in no way have been able to fulfil this task. Even then – although the Swiss regiments still retained their distinct national identity – it had been unable to subdue the revolution of 1849, and the Pope was forced to flee to Gaeta.

The Swiss Confederation's resolution of 1849, which prohibited its subjects from continuing to enlist in foreign military services, had brought about a very unfavourable change in the composition of the mercenary troops previously serving in Rome and Naples. The reliable corps that had hitherto been hired to compensate for the reluctance of the people of central and southern Italy to become soldiers themselves had become a foreign legion of adventurers and prodigal sons from all nations, lacking the necessary strict discipline of the Foreign Legion of Algiers, and whose members were susceptible to every form of seduction by revolutionary propaganda. The Indigeni, the native Roman troops, were in an even more pitiful state, and an energetic reorganisation was therefore urgently required.

The choice of a commander-in-chief to carry out this arduous task fell, through the efforts of the new papal Minister of War, Monsignor Count Merode, upon the French General *Lamoricière*, the hero of Constantine, whom Louis Napoleon had had arrested and exiled along with other opponents during the coup d'état.

The Pope had sought [15]
permission for this choice, and this had been graciously granted – though the right to decide on further matters was, of course, reserved. Lamoricière had assumed command with a proclamation on 8 April and, in the face of the thousand obstacles that stood in his way everywhere due to long-standing abuses and the methods of Roman administration, had done all that was possible within five months.

But right in the midst of his efforts, the Turin cabinet suddenly carried out its act of violence.

Whilst Garibaldi was leading a revolt in Italy from the south and was in the process of driving out the Bourbon monarchy, the Sardinian army was to come to his aid from the north by preventing the new papal army from joining forces with the young king and the loyalist section of his army at the Volturno line or in Gaeta, and together driving back the guerrilla forces, and at the same time, in defiance of all treaties, incorporating the territory of the Papal States—up to the area of the French occupation of Rome—into the new Italy of King Victor Emmanuel. Count Cavour could not

hesitate any longer in laying claim to the conquests of his vanguard, the Freischaeren, if he was not to run the risk that the old republican Mazzini, who had already joined Ledru-Rollin in Naples, would snatch the spoils from him.

In the midst of peace, without any justification, in flagrant defiance of all international law and all sovereign independence, and completely disregarding the Treaty of Zurich, the Turin Cabinet suddenly demanded, after the
[16]
army of *the 'Res* gentiluomo' – the King's 'gentleman', as the Revolution called him – had quietly advanced to the borders of the Papal States, on 7 September, the Roman government to immediately dismiss all foreign troops in the service of the Pope, and General Fanti was forced to declare to Lamoricière that he had orders to march into the Papal States immediately should the Pope's troops dare to suppress a revolutionary movement in favour of the Sardinian annexation in any part of their own territory!

The demand was a blatant mockery of all established law. Yet – who cared
about that!

Cardinal Antonelli had, of course, rejected this demand on behalf of his sovereign.

The monarchs by the grace of God, the legitimate holders of the European thrones, looked on in silence at this outrageous act of revolutionary arbitrariness – Emperor Napoleon and the Treaty of Zurich had, after all, proclaimed non-intervention.

What did it matter that they had also guaranteed the Italian princes their thrones! Only the Emperor of Austria responded to this infamy with a manifesto addressed to his subjects in the service of the Pope, in which he called upon them to fight loyally and bravely against the Revolution.

On 10 September, a band of 600 irregulars from Romagna raided papal territory and plundered Fossombrone.
[17]

Colonel Zambelli dispatched two companies and had the irregulars chased out and back across the border.

As a result, *without a declaration of war*, the entire Piedmontese army marched into papal territory, overran the small papal detachments and garrisons, and forced them to capitulate.

Only with great difficulty did some of the larger columns manage to withdraw to Ancona. – This
is the moment at which, having concluded our novel *Villafranca* (Solferino
no), resume our account of contemporary history.

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The old way of life in *Loreto* – when well over a hundred thousand pilgrims still flocked annually to its sanctuary, before the sacrilegious hand of the French in 1797 robbed it of its treasures – seemed to have returned and filled the long street of the pleasant little town in the province of Macerata.

But instead of conch-shell hats, one saw only the caps of the Cacciatori or the helmets of the Dragoons and the bearskin caps of the gendarmes; instead of long pilgrims' staffs, the sabres

and rifle butts clattered on the broad marble steps of the magnificent cathedral, which enshrines the *casa santa* – the House of the Blessed Virgin – within its walls.

Officers and soldiers of the line and Swiss regiments, the Franco-Belgian and Irish Legions, the Bersaglieri and Guidi, the artillery, gendarmes and Chevaux-légers mingled in a colourful jumble, doubling the usual street life of Italian towns.

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General *Lamoricière* (de la Moricière) had entered Loreto the previous evening, 16 September, with the Reserve Corps on his way to Ancona, after Count *Palffy*, together with the Guides and a squadron of gendarmes, had driven out the Piedmontese dragoons who had already seized the town. Loreto, a small town of about 8,000 inhabitants, lies on a tree-lined hill and consists of a single long street. From the heights, one can see the Adriatic Sea, some 3 miglia away. The Piedmontese, vastly outnumbering their opponents, were blocking the route to Ancona in the Musone valley.

It was around 6 o'clock in the afternoon when a group of officers stood and sat near the cathedral, chatting and drinking beneath and in front of the arcades of an inn. They were men of various ages and from different branches of the armed forces and nationalities, who made up the Commander-in-Chief's corps.

The largest group gathered round a young officer in the smart uniform of the Franco-Belgian Legion; his sash identified him as an adjutant, and his horse—still steaming and led about by an orderly— bore witness to the strenuous ride he had just completed. He was probably about twenty-four years old, had a sturdy, medium-sized build, and his open face, whilst displaying a certain calmness, nevertheless revealed great strength of will.

'I can assure you, Messieurs,' said the officer, a wine glass in his hand, 'a ride from Macerata via Lupone and Montesanto to get here in four hours is no joke; but you yourselves undertook the march yesterday

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and can therefore judge what *Coeur de lion*, my brave bay, has achieved. Here's to you, gentlemen, and to the fact that I have spared you a pointless sortie. We shall need all our strength tomorrow.'

He emptied his glass, which one of the officers immediately refilled.

'Our battalion had already assembled to set off,' remarked a captain of the Swiss Regiment, 'and Lieutenant Uhde, with two guns, was to accompany us to carry out a diversionary attack against Recanati, when you arrived with the news. Cialdini must have believed that General Pimodan would be marching along the main road from Macerata.'

'In half an hour you will see the head of our column on the southern heights by the coast.'

'Then the Sardinians will realise they have been duped and that their battle position at Recanati is in vain,' said Major *Bell*. 'How strong is your corps now, Herr von *Merode?*'

"The first and second battalions of Cacciatori[1], the two battalions of Carabinieri and Bersaglieri and my own, Monsieur."

"And cavalry?"

[1] Hunters.

‘The German Chevaux-légers and two squadrons of Dragoons; unfortunately, the battery is rather poorly drawn. The devil take Count Cotodon for his negligence in failing to dispatch the horses from Trieste. The General would have
[20]
have done better to send an officer instead of His Holiness’s stablemaster, who knows nothing but the fattened geldings that pull the state coach from the Vatican to St Peter’s once a week!”

An old captain shrugged. ‘That’s down to that wretched nepotism. If only he confined himself to that, we might count ourselves lucky. But at such a perilous moment as this, it even extends to the filling of officer posts in the army.’

The young Belgian stood up straight. “What do you mean by that, comrade?”

“No offence intended,” apologised the German. “It wouldn’t occur to me to question the integrity of decent people like yourself, whether or not you’re a cousin of the Minister of War, who himself faced the bullets under Lamorière in Algeria. But if you look at that table, you’ll have to admit that I’m not entirely wrong.”

“Who do you mean?”

‘Well, those two gentlemen over there, who fled from Naples under that scoundrel Vial, all the way to Rome, and of whom one, because he is a principe, was assigned to us as a major three days ago, whilst the other is to command a battery of artillery tomorrow.’

“That is certainly a poor recommendation. But what news have you from Ancona, and how has the General fared with the war chest? We’ve only heard that, out of concern for it, he took the detour along the coast.”
[21]

“Quatrebarbes, that good old white-bearded fellow,” reported the Swiss major, “proclaimed a state of siege in the fortress on the 12th. You know of the disaster at Fanno?”

“No, Major, nothing in detail!”

“Well, after our men had driven out the invading irregulars from Fossombrone, the delegate from Urbino sent word on Tuesday that the Piedmontese had crossed the border without a declaration of war. Their lancers ambushed the detachment just outside Fanno and scattered it. The garrison at Fanno was forced to surrender, as were those at Perugia, Pesaro and Orvieto; the rest of the column managed to join up with Brigade de Courten and reached Ancona on the 14th. Lieutenant von Falckenstein and Captain von Einem covered the retreat and conducted themselves admirably. In Ancona itself, work is being carried out day and night on the fortifications, which are, unfortunately, said to be in a very neglected state.’

‘And the Sardinian fleet?’

“The St. Paolo[1], which we were fortunate enough to encounter on a reconnaissance mission at Porto di Recanati, whilst the barges carrying the money for the fortress had failed to arrive, knew nothing of it yet. But rumour has it that fishing boats sighted six warships heading north out on the Adriatic yesterday.”

“Hopefully they were French ships. You know, [22]
that General Goyon is due to arrive in Rome today with 25,000 men and 48 guns.”

[1] A small papal steamer.

“Do you really believe that?” said a resonant voice from behind the officer.

Everyone turned round – an officer of the Gulden from the Commander-in-Chief’s staff had joined the group.

‘Ah, *Marmont*, it’s you! I looked for you in vain at the General’s earlier.’ The Belgian extended his hand to the newcomer, which the young Duke of Ragusa shook warmly. ‘But what does this mean? Do you not believe that the Emperor will keep his word?’

‘Grammont[1] assured the Cardinal of this, and your uncle personally

,’ said the guide mockingly; ‘but do you really believe that Louis Napoleon has forgotten the resistance of 2 December? It might well tickle him to play a trick on the reputation of his old adversary. A rebuke from the envoy will trouble him less than a dressing-down from Madame Eugénie.’

‘It would be shameful!’ cried Count *Palffy*, the commander of the Bersaglieri. ‘The promise expressly states that the Emperor will oppose any Piedmontese invasion of the Papal States. It was solely on this basis that Austria refrained from any intervention.’

The Duke laughed. “My dear comrade,” he said, “be content with the glory of your bold deeds yesterday

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reconnaissance and the death of that fine black horse, which the grapeshot killed beneath your saddle – we should not be allowed to bask in many other laurels. *By the way* – how is your companion, that mad Irishman with his head wound?”

‘He’s got such a thick skull that I reckon even a twelve-pounder would bounce off it,’ remarked Major Bell. ‘He’s sitting over there, drinking with the Italians, and would scarcely have had the bandage tied round his head had his lovely sister not persuaded him to do so. Come here, *O’Donnell* – we’re talking about you!’

The Irishman, who had fought his way through with part of his company before General Schmidt’s surrender in Perugia and had caught up with the commander-in-chief’s column, rose at the call and joined the group. He was a tall, athletic man with the bearing of a true Irish gentleman. For although he held no officer’s rank and served merely as a volunteer, he was indeed one, and his lively blue eyes, his handsome, fresh face with its slightly too full lips, together with his sturdy build, revealed him to be a son of the Emerald Isle.

‘Good heavens, gentlemen,’ he said cheerfully, ‘it must be a matter of great importance for you to disturb my father’s son whilst he’s enjoying a glass of this splendid grape wine. What is it?’

‘We just wanted to know, dear comrade,’ said one of the officers, ‘whether the grapeshot last night did you any harm?’

[24]

‘By Saint Patrick, sir, do you call that thing that grazed past my head a ‘kartät-sche’? I’ll never take part in a fox hunt in Galway again if an Irish potato isn’t harder than that.’

“Nevertheless, Monsieur O’Donnell,” said the guide, “the Commander-in-Chief has appointed you a lieutenant in the Dragoons for that potato.”

“Bah – seriously, Acuschla, my dear?”

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[1] The Duke of Grammont, French envoy in Rome.

‘Take my word for it – your patent will be signed this very evening.’

The Irishman gave a merry little leap and tore the black cloth from his forehead, which still bore a sizeable graze.

‘Bloody hell, then it’s all the more necessary that I celebrate with a few bottles before Mary gives me a lecture on propriety. That old miser, my uncle, must lend me some of his Moroccan millions to set myself up!’

“Is the Duke of Tetuan a relative of yours?” asked the Belgian.

“Bloody right, although he wants nothing to do with me because he claims I’ve squandered the O’Donnells’ fortune on sherry and horses’ hooves, and that I’m a good-for-nothing. As if an honest lad, however strong his hands may be, could resist a whole army of constables and sheriffs once they’ve set their minds on seizing his inheritance?!»

‘And that’s why we have the pleasure of seeing
you in [25]
our ranks, Lieutenant O’Donnell?’ asked the guide with a laugh.

“Oh, Saint Patrick, no – there was another fateful circumstance involved. The sheriffs would have bothered me little, but I had to get out of the way of a lady who had stubbornly set her mind on throwing her twenty thousand pounds’ income at me.”

“What – a lady with twenty thousand pounds wanted to marry you, and you refused?”

“The devil take it, she’s an Englishwoman with maudlin curls, and Mary would never get on with her in a million years! You know, sir – Englishwomen all have a bit too much of a streak about them.”

The officers’ laughter was general, and the circle had grown.

‘So you managed to escape her by fleeing England?’ asked the guide.

“Escaped? – By Jove, you know nothing of women’s stubbornness. She pursued me to Madrid and Paris, where I had two duels in a single day because of her, and I’d bet a hundred pounds against an old cat that, had she known where we’d gone, she’d certainly have followed us to Rome.”

‘Monsieur O’Donnell,’ said the Belgian with a smile, ‘I believe I have some bad
news for you.”
“What might that be?”

‘Incidentally, General Pimodan is indebted to you, for thanks to you we have managed to move at least one of our guns on.’
[26]

‘I don’t understand you, sir.’

“Listen. On the march just before Macerata, we came across a carriage drawn by four horses, which had come from Rome and was bound for Ancona. The coachman had excellent horses, and the general didn’t hesitate for a moment to requisition them and have them harnessed to our rather poorly drawn guns.”

The Irishman was still looking at the speaker with a puzzled expression. “The devil take me and chop me up into a fricassee if I can make head or tail of it . . .”

“Well, *parbleu* – I’d say the matter is quite simple! The carriage belonged to an Englishwoman who is travelling with a passport and special letters of introduction from the British Consul, accompanied only by an old servant and her courier.”

"By an old servant – a chap, thin and [and] tall as a hop pole, with white hair?"

"You've described him perfectly, and I recall that the lady had her courier enquire at headquarters whether a fellow countryman of hers, Mr O'Donnell or O'Connell – I didn't quite catch it – was among the troops."

Amidst the officers' resounding laughter, the unfortunate man collapsed onto the nearest chair like a living embodiment of misery, staring absent-mindedly first at one, then at another.

'Oh, woe, woe!' he groaned, alternately beating his hands against his knees – 'I am a lost man! Ask the General to send me to the very tip of the vanguard – but God shall
[27]
damn my soul, I believe she'll pull me out of the line of fire the moment she has the slightest inkling that I'm here. For heaven's sake, give me some advice on what I should do?"

'But for heaven's sake, is the young lady really that old and ugly?'

"Ugly? She's the prettiest and kindest girl I know, and just twenty-two years old! That's just it – she's the best catch in the whole of Ireland. If only it weren't for that damned will!"

"What will?"

"Well – the old usurer, her father's! He was the main creditor and has ruined us. Just to get out of purgatory a bit sooner, that fool decreed on his deathbed that his daughter should marry me with all that money. But I'll be damned if I'll redeem him, even if it breaks my heart!"

The laughter doubled at this naive confession. "Listen, comrade," said the Italian artillery officer, who had also stepped forward, in broken French, "I am prepared to relieve you of your torment and marry the lady with all her money."

'Not a chance!' growled Paddy, glaring like a vicious bull terrier at the gaunt little figure of the Neapolitan. 'I'd break every bone in your body! Saint Patrick, what on earth would Miss Judith want with a skin-and-bones man like you?'

"Signor . . . ," roared the Italian. [28]

"Peace, gentlemen!" said the old German major, "here comes the commander-in-chief." General *Lamoricière* was returning with his staff from the reconnaissance mission he had undertaken against Castelfi-
dardo.

The General was 54 years old at the time – he was born on 5 February 1806 in Nantes and was the son of a legitimist family; – but neither the eighteen campaigns in Algeria, the last of which forced Abd-el-Kader to surrender to the Duke of Aumale, nor the parliamentary campaign from '48 to '51, during which the 'grateful' people of Paris shot his horse from under him and the power-hungry President sent his friend and Minister of War, Cavaignac, to Ham and into exile, nor even his gout had

bent. The general sat lightly in the saddle and was conversing with Colonel *Blumenstiel*, the chief of artillery.

The officers had all risen and were saluting the commanding colonel with respect. The Duke of Ragusa nodded to his companions on the staff; the leading figures of France and Belgium were represented among them and the Guides. The leader of the latter, Count *Bourbon Chalus*, remained behind the retinue and stood with the officers.

'You have timed it perfectly, Captain,' he said to the Belgian, 'the vanguard of General Pimodan's columns has been visible on the heights for five minutes; in two hours the main body may be in Loreto. Unfortunately, there is a shortage of provisions for the poor lads – the Santa Casa was not prepared for so many unholy
[29]
visitors. Marmont, I have a task for you.'

The young duke stepped closer to the saddle, from which the major spoke quietly to him. Marmont turned back to the group, his gaze seeming to scrutinise each individual thoughtfully.

'The only one who could carry out this task is Palffy,' he said, shaking his head, 'but the General will need him more tomorrow. Will you give me a free hand in the choice?'

'I trust you; it must be a man who would rather break his neck than let himself be caught up with and – to put it bluntly – who doesn't care much for his own life. As soon as Pimodan is here and darkness falls, he can receive his instructions. The General has set aside one of his own horses for him, and the guide will be ready!'

"I hope I can find you the right man. If misfortune befalls him, let us look after his pretty sister."

"Who do you mean?"

'The Irishman who joined us from Perugia. During yesterday's attack, when the gendarmes refused to advance at a trot, the lad threw a sergeant out of the saddle, leapt onto the horse without touching the stirrup, and brought the wild stallion under control as if he'd been riding it in the riding school for a year. Now he'll have the chance to put his lieutenant's commission to good use straight away.'

'I noticed him too, but I thought he was [30]
wounded. *Eh bien*, do speak to him. There's a council of war with the General at 8 o'clock – we'll have our hands full. Addio!"

When the Duke looked round for the legionnaire whom he had just recommended to a life-or-death adventure, he saw him talking to two women—or rather, to one of them; for the second, a nun of the Order of St Francis, was standing a few paces away from the others with a clergyman.

The lady with whom the Irishman was speaking was young and possessed a certain graceful freshness that made the most favourable impression. She wore a short Scottish dress and a light-coloured riding jacket over it, which contrasted pleasingly with the blue and green checked fabric of the dress and waistcoat. A simple white collar revealed her beautifully shaped, full neck, and a low grey felt hat with a blue feather sat upon her luxuriant, short-curled hair of a delightful blonde colour, the sort of shade that only the North can produce. Radiant eyes of true azure gazed cheerfully yet demurely from beneath the brim of the hat

from her round, friendly face with its dainty, pert snub nose. A certain family resemblance proved that the young lady was the sister of the Irishman, to whom she was speaking earnestly, trying to persuade him of something.

The nun presented a quite different appearance, although she could only have been a few years older than the Irishwoman. She was tall, and as far as her clumsy nun's habit of coarse black cloth
[31]
, she was of a slender build. A pale face, betraying deep sorrow, of noble regularity and the finest complexion, was revealed beneath the helmet-like covering of the smooth white headband across her forehead and cheeks, beneath the black headscarf—such as is worn by the sisters of the Order of St Francis of Assisi who have dedicated themselves to nursing the sick. The delicate, aristocratic hand holding the prayer book was tucked away, as if bashfully, beneath the coarse sleeve, and the nun's eyes were fixed firmly on the floor.

Beside her, her spiritual director waited with a certain impatience for the young Irishwoman's conversation to come to an end. He was a coarse, bony figure with regular features of a grim expression, which the bushy eyebrows above his clumsy, plebeian nose made even more unpleasant. His complexion was a uniform redness, such as is often seen in men of brutal desires, and although he could not have been much more than thirty-five years of age, he lacked all suppleness, and his whole demeanour was harsh and repulsive.

'Well, Acuschla, darling,' said the new lieutenant at last, switching back to French instead of the Irish dialect in which they had been speaking until then,
'if you insist, so be it. To be honest, it's perhaps the wisest thing you can do; for look, Mary, I can't very well shoot a bullet into the ribs of an honest lad every day just because of your pretty face, and at the moment I'm myself
[32]
in such a tight spot that I'd rather run away. Do you know who's hot on our heels?"

"Who, then? The Piedmontese!"

"The devil take the Piedmontese and their Musjöh Garibaldi too. I wouldn't care a sparrow's feather for the whole lot of them. But Judith Hoghborn is less than twenty miles from here—I've received the damned confirmation!"

"Bah – just get it over with and marry her!"

Terenz O'Donnell stared at his lively sister almost as dumbfounded as he had stared at Count Merode earlier when he'd heard that the usurer's daughter was nearby.

"Well, by Saint Patrick and the giant Fingal," he said at last, "you could have told me that sooner. Now, of course, it's too late; for I can't possibly let the women force my hand! – But you are and always will be a strange lot. If one is foolish enough to run after you, you lead an honest lad by the nose, and if one pays you no mind, you don't know how to flatter. The devil take me, I wish I'd got my father's daughter happily married off first, and if it's no one else, then let it be a nun's habit for the time being. A goblin like you'll look splendid in it!'

She struck him across the fingers with the riding crop she was holding. ‘You naughty man,’ she said with a laugh, ‘what must the venerable gentleman think of this, and Sister *Regina*, who is a true saint and a
[33]
true blessing for me; for had I not found her, I would truly have forgotten how to speak, since no one here understands me—at least, no woman. I am now going with them to the Lazareth to see what a woman’s hand can do to help. But if you fetch the flags—even if they are only old, tattered horse-tails—I must be there, nun or no nun!”

The merry beauty gave her brother a dainty, coquettish curtsy, directed for the most part at the captain of the guides, who was just approaching the Irishman and saluting him gallantly, and hopped back to the stern nun and the clergyman, who had been watching her worldly, vivacious behaviour intently with a sombre gaze, in which, at times, a quite different, eerily fiery and consuming expression would blaze for a few moments, only to be immediately regained and suppressed.

‘Forgive me, Sister Regina,’ said the young Irishwoman, who took little notice of the clergyman, ‘for keeping you up for so long, but I simply had to tell my brother that you wish to take me under your kind protection; and now let us continue on our way, if you please.’

The merciful sister nodded kindly to her and immediately continued on her way along the street, without so much as a glance at the warlike surroundings on either side. Only now could one see that the foot, of aristocratic delicacy and smallness, which occasionally peeped out from beneath the black habit as she walked, was bare, and that she was therefore – probably as a result of a vow or
[34]
penance—for the rule of the order does not prescribe this—was making her way barefoot.

They had not gone fifty paces further, still pursued by the officers’ spyglasses and remarks, when they encountered a company of the Foreign Regiment on the march.

For the most part, they were wild, bearded figures of the most diverse nationalities, from every corner of Europe, boys often no older than sixteen and veterans who had fought on every battlefield of the fateful past twelve years – good-for-nothings and vagabonds who had joined the Papal Legion to eke out a living, or to have the opportunity to rob and plunder, or to escape some punishment in their homeland, and, on the other hand, brave, valiant soldiers and ardent defenders of the Church besieged by the Revolution, who had rushed to the Holy Father’s cry for help, ready to sacrifice blood and life for the noble cause.

Unfortunately, it had not yet been possible to fuse these disparate elements sufficiently to form a capable corps, and the officers were forced to exercise a certain degree of leniency.

The clergyman stepped aside with his two female companions and continued on his way, just as the leading captain’s gaze fell upon the nun.

He lowered his sword, struck and dismayed. ‘Countess *Amalie* – for heaven’s sake . . .’

The Sister of Mercy had heard the cry,

[35]
for a moment her eyes fluttered upwards, then fixed firmly on the ground once more; a dark flush spread across her pale, suffering face, and she hurried on.

The officer had sheathed his sword and given an order to his lieutenant; then he hurried after the three, who had already reached the entrance to the Convent of St Clare, where the hastily established hospital was located; for even the church buildings had been occupied by troops out of necessity.

The hand of the nun, who had hurried ahead, was already reaching for the bell pull when the officer beat her to it.

'Countess Amalie – is it really you? How did you get here – and in this attire?' he asked in German.

The nun turned deathly pale and trembled violently. Only with great difficulty could she master her inner turmoil enough to finally utter a few words in reply.

'It is the habit of the vocation I have chosen for myself, sir,' she whispered, 'from now on my name is simply Sister Regina.'

The vicar had stepped forward. 'I must ask you, sir,' he said gruffly, also in German, having heard the address, 'not to trouble the pious sister any further, or, if you have a message for her, to deliver it at the convent's parlour grille.'

The officer looked at him with an air of dignity and coldness. "If I am not mistaken, Vicar *Tangerfeld?*" The clergyman bowed slightly.
[36]

'The son of a cottager belonging to my uncle, Count Wunster, who sent him to the seminary at his own expense?' the captain continued harshly. 'Then you must also know that this lady is a relative of mine, and that – even though she has taken her vows – I am not forbidden to speak to her. A soldier in the field is not master of his own time – moreover, our conversation can only be brief, as I must rejoin my company! – So step back or step forward, as you please – and do not disturb me any further.'

The vicar's red face grew even darker at the harsh rebuke, but with clerical self-control he suppressed a vehement reply and contented himself with taking a few steps back and drawing the young Irishwoman's attention to the beauty of the view which, from the convent gate, stretched across the hills covered with fruit trees and vineyards towards the Adriatic Sea.

The nun had sunk, trembling and exhausted, onto the stone bench beside the gate; her hands, clasped over the rosary, rested in her lap, and her eyes—from which heavy tears slowly rolled down her pale cheek—were fixed on the small crucifix, the image of the exalted martyr and Promiser.

The officer stood before her.

He was of medium height and well-proportioned; his face, now agitated, usually showed kindness and calm, and suggested an age of about twenty-five.

'Cousin Amalie, dearest Countess, how did you [37]
here? In this dress, in this company, barefoot – you, who just two years ago were the celebrated beauty of the highest circles, even of the court in Hanover?!"

“I repeat, Baron *Kerßen*, I am nothing but the humble Sister Regina. A vow has led me to Assisi, to the tomb of the holy founder of our Order. I cannot and will not hear a word of the worldly matters to which I have renounced myself!”

“And the Prince – and – – Hermann?”

She covered her face with her hands; a convulsive sob shook her chest.

The vicar did not notice – he was speaking to the Irishwoman.

For several minutes, the nun struggled with the memories that had so suddenly been stirred within her – she might have succumbed to their spell, to her pain, had not an angel from on high come to her aid.

He floated down to her on the chimes of the evening blessing.

The gentle call to evening prayer, which is still observed with care and devotion in all Catholic countries, spread a deep, solemn silence over the agitated crowd. Most sank to their knees; others contented themselves with making the sign of the cross.

The silent prayer had also strengthened the nun’s heart. As she rose from the ground, the peace of holy renunciation shone upon her face. She calmly extended her slender, delicate hand to her relative.

‘I, too, had not expected to see you here, cousin,’ she said, ‘I thought you were in Berlin.’

[38]

‘I took my leave four months ago. Have letters, or at least the newspapers, not informed you of my situation?’

‘Very little worldly news penetrates the tranquillity of the quiet convent in Münster; – it seems you were not aware of my calling either. I am glad to hear that you and our old friends are well – –’

‘He’s been serving with a line regiment in Posen since last winter,’ he interrupted her hastily.

“Hush – say no more of that! The longing to offer my prayers at the altar of the merciful Mother of All Sorrows brought me here from Perugia eight days ago. The venerable Mr Tangerfeld accompanied me on my pilgrimage. The sudden outbreak of war has kept us here, blocking our route to Ancona and Trieste.”

“And is there nothing I can do for you, Cousin – Sister Regina?”

“I am delighted to see you amongst the soldiers of Christ. Perhaps, under your protection, we might reach Ancona. The young girl there, who has a brother in the army, wishes to accompany us. The poor thing joined me because none of the other women here understood English. May we count on your protection?”

“Certainly – only – –”

“Are you hesitating?”

“The outcome of tomorrow lies in God’s hands – the enemy has three times our strength.”

[39]

‘The Lord is strong even in the weak! In any case, I shall have the opportunity to fulfil my duty here too. Farewell! I must attend to my patients.’

She made the sign of the cross and rang the bell. The gate opened – without looking back, she stepped into the convent courtyard.

As the clergyman passed the officer to follow her, the latter bowed briefly. “If you require my services, Vicar, send for me at the Foreign Legion’s quarters.”

The clergyman contented himself with a nod of assent – the gate closed again behind him and the girl.

———

The Duke of Ragusa had taken the new lieutenant under his wing with that chivalrous cordiality which characterises French officers, and led him along the street.

‘My friend, I have a task for you!’

“For me? *Goddam!* I’ve guessed – it’s about that little Italian scarecrow over there?”

The guide laughed. “No – you’re completely mistaken! These gentlemen would prefer a knife thrust through another man to a sword thrust from their own hand to restore their honour. No – it comes directly, or rather indirectly, from the Commander-in-Chief.”

“Bloody hell! What does he want? Am I to take a battery with my countrymen?
With the greatest
pleasure!” [40]

“That’s not it, though—pardon me!—it’s not much easier. Are you a good horseman?”

‘Passable! A stone wall would have to be over three ells high for me not to dare it, and even then one’s only risking one’s neck. But to hell with all this sport – I’ve had nothing but wretched nag-like horses between my legs here.’

“We’ve seen for ourselves what you’re capable of. I’ve been tasked with finding an officer who might choose the commander-in-chief’s finest horse to deliver a dispatch.”

“Damn! That’s tempting – the chestnut with the white left foreleg –”

“He’s at your service! I had you in mind – to be honest, because I thought I’d be doing you a favour by sending him from a distance.” He looked at him with a smile.

[“]Certainly, Captain, only – – –”

“I mean the Englishwoman with the tresses and the 20,000 pounds sterling!”

“God damn me – yes, that’s true! If she catches me here, I’m done for. I can’t even get any sympathy from Mary anymore, even though she’s my own sister and otherwise a perfectly sensible girl who can leap over any ditch up to ten feet wide in a flash!”

“I fully acknowledge these excellent qualities, but we’re talking about your mission now. You’re to go to Ancona!”

“To the fortress? But for heaven’s sake, I’m no [41]
bird that flies through the air, and on the ground this Mr Cialdini stands between us and the city.”

“Even if you are no bird, Monsieur O’Donnell, you are nonetheless an excellent horseman, and that is almost as good, so long as four sound hooves hold out. The General will attempt to break through the enemy lines tomorrow. How and by which route will be decided by the council of war, which is to take place upon General Pimodan’s arrival. However, if our attack is to succeed in the face of the enemy’s overwhelming superiority, a

raid by the garrison of Ancona must support it and attack the Piedmontese from the rear. You are to convey the message and the orders to that effect.'

"Damn it, I'd love to – but I don't know the route or the terrain."

'A man from Loreto has been put forward to the Commander-in-Chief – a former smuggler or bandit who claims to know the area and is willing to undertake the mission. But the Commander-in-Chief does not particularly trust the Italians – and, in most cases, with good reason. That is why a bold and determined man from our own ranks is to accompany him – a man who carries the dispatch and who, at the slightest sign of treachery, will shoot the guide dead and then risk life and limb to break through the Piedmontese posts or bring the dispatch back here. The route along the coast via Umana is not yet occupied by the enemy, or at least only by a few sentries. It runs continuously along the coast as far as Umana. If you have successfully reached this
[42]
place, you will be beyond the enemy lines and it will then be just a ride of eight to ten miglia[1], which, however, cannot possibly be entrusted to an Italian; for they are almost all poor riders, as you yourself saw yesterday during the gendarmes' attack on Loreto. 'I would undertake this mission myself, but the Commander-in-Chief has assigned me another task. Now tell me frankly, do you have the desire and the strength to carry out this mission, or must I look for someone else?'

'I'd challenge anyone to a duel,' asserted the Irishman, 'who dared to take this mission away from me. When am I to set off?'

"As soon as night falls. You are to report to headquarters in an hour's time and present yourself to the Major of the Guides. No heavy armament; you'll find reliable pistols in the horse's saddlebags. So, at most, your sabre and your revolver, and dark clothing."

"I'll be there!"

"The leader is expecting you at the corner of the Franciscan nuns' convent. Until then, then – *Parbleu!* There's Count *Pimodan* himself with his staff!"

The eagerly awaited figure came at a brisk canter along the road from the southern entrance to the city, accompanied by several officers, including Prince *Odescalchi*, commander of the army's cavalry, and the valiant Major Becdelièvre, commander of the Franco-Belgian battalion
[43]
. The Duke called a brief *'a rivederla!'*[2] to the Irishman and hurried to meet the new arrivals.

The officers, who had been strolling about, and the soldiers gathered joyfully around them, whilst the General dismounted from his horse in front of the gate of the bishop's palace, which served as headquarters.

'Buona sera[3], Messieurs! Good evening, Merode!' said the valiant commander, as he the latter his hand. "You see, I've kept my word, for you can

[1] 4 Italian miglia = 1 German mile.

[2] Goodbye!

[3] Good evening!

You can't have gained more than a two-hour lead on me. My vanguard will be here in half an hour – I hope I'm still arriving in good time? – But where is the Commander-in-Chief?"

'Here, my dear Count! You are most welcome!'

Lamoricière had come down the steps; he warmly welcomed his comrade-in-arms and led him up the broad marble steps.

The General missed the first step whilst giving an order to his companions over his shoulder, and, stumbling, nearly fell.

'*Mort de Dieu!* There you see, Lamoricière,' he said with a laugh, 'what a bad omen you've given me. But never mind, as long as we reach Ancona!' –

The commanding officers, who had been summoned to the council of war, hurried to headquarters; the aides-de-camp and quartermasters had their hands full ensuring that
[44]
the expected columns of the Second Brigade, which were arriving in stages, and to procure provisions, of which there was a severe shortage. Outside headquarters, troops of all branches were encamped; large bivouac fires had been lit in the street and in the gardens, and the local inhabitants moved anxiously and agitatedly amongst the groups of soldiers, where people were swearing, laughing, joking and quarrelling in four or five languages. –

A good hour and a half had passed in this way; night – the translucent darkness of late Italian summer nights – had already fallen over the hills and the sea, when the young Irish officer leaned against the marble basin of the bubbling fountain in the forecourt of the bishop's palazzo, waiting for further orders. Just then, the band of the Courten Brigade's line regiment marched past the door, accompanied by the colour guards of all the military units – the entire assembled small army seemed to be converging on the headquarters, forming a wide passage leading to the main portal of the cathedral.

The two Italian officers who had sat at the same table as the Irishman that afternoon were just passing him by.

'May I ask you, *mon Prince*,' said the young lieutenant politely, 'what is supposed to be happening there?'

'Well, don't you know that His Holiness has instructed the delegates to retrieve the banners which Don Juan d'Austria captured in the Battle of Lepanto against the Turks in honour of Christendom, and which are kept in the Santa Casa
[45]
—to be handed over to the fighter against 'new Islamism'[1], so that they may be hoisted outside his quarters and inspire the warriors of the Holy Church? They are just now to be brought out of the cathedral with great ceremony.'

There was a certain mockery in the Principe's announcement, which the honest son of Erin, however, did not grasp – indeed, he could scarcely recall from his days at college in Dublin who Don Juan d'Austria had been.

'All right by me,' he grumbled, 'I'd much rather have a good brigade of Paddy's than that old rubbish, and it would probably be more effective too. But watch out, gentlemen, here comes the Commander-in-Chief!'

[1] From Lamoricière's proclamation of 8 April.

The commander did indeed appear on the steps of the Palazzo, followed by all the members of the War Council. The band played ‘*Pio* nono’ and the colour guards set off on the march.

‘Lieutenant O’Donnell?’ called a voice through the groups in the courtyard.

“Here, Captain!”

The Duke of Ragusa hurried over. ‘Major Bourbon has sent you this dispatch – he must accompany the general staff to the cathedral. You know your instructions. Go to the northern corner of the monastery – the commander will be waiting for you there. The password is: *San Pietro in Montorio*. The horse will be brought there in ten minutes. Have you made the necessary arrangements regarding the Signora, your sister?’

[46]

“Yes, Captain.”

“Good – otherwise I would have placed myself at your disposal. One more thing – should any misfortune befall you, ensure with your life that the dispatch does not fall into Cialdini’s hands. Now, God be with you! May Heaven guide you safely through all dangers; see you in . . . ”

He caught sight of the Principe and his companion, who were standing a few paces away; he meaningfully placed his finger to his lips in the direction of the Irishman and took his leave with a brief nod.

The Irishman, too, tucked his sabre under his arm and left the courtyard. The Principe, however, caught up with him after the first hundred paces.

‘Must you set out tonight, comrade?’

“On duty, *mon Prince!*”

“Ah – an order to the outposts! I’d rather, instead of this flag-waving spectacle, go with you to see whether the Piedmontese gentlemen are keeping a good watch.”

“I’m afraid not,” said the Irishman dryly, “I must go my own way! Goodbye!”

“Tomorrow?”

“If the devil hasn’t sent us a Sardinian bullet by then, I hope so.

‘Addio, Signor!’

He turned away briefly and strode across the street.

‘Did you hear that, Negroni,’ said the Principe, taking the artilleryman’s arm, ‘that lad’s off to Ancona – there’s no doubt about it, even though the Frenchman swallowed his words when he saw us. What’s to be done?’

[47]

‘Unfortunately, not much, as he’s setting off in ten minutes. We must reckon on them keeping their eyes open and maintaining a good watch. Now, above all, we must find out the decision of the War Council. That is your task, Prince, whilst I go and see the Father so that he has the messenger ready.’

[“]They had followed the Irishman at a distance as far as the Franciscan monastery and saw him there, at the corner of the wall, approach a man standing by a mule.[“]

The Irishman had spotted him straight away and had walked over to him.

“*Buona sera, Signore*,” he said, mustering his few Italian phrases.

"*Grazie, Eccellenza!*"

"I hope you are the right man," continued the lieutenant in French, the only foreign language he knew, "but I understand very little Italian."

"*Le mot, monsieur?*"

"Ah, that's excellent. *San Pietro in Montorio!*"

'Very well, Signor – I am the one you're looking for. I have met the French gentlemen often enough in Rome and therefore understand a little of their language. I've been told that you're an excellent horseman – but I don't see your horse?'

"It will be here shortly."

The two companions for the perilous journey used the pause to take a closer look at one another. The guide was a stocky man

[48]

build, as far as the brightness of the night and the light from the numerous bivouac fires allowed one to see; he was still in the prime of life, about forty years old. A black, curly beard covered the entire lower part of his face; above his narrow, hawk-like nose and beneath the pointed green hat, such as the country folk in the Apennines wear, two sharp, dark eyes sparkled. The man was wrapped in a loose-fitting brown cloak, the casual drape of which revealed the traditional dress of the mountain dwellers. A crucifix hung from his red breastplate; pistols and a Neapolitan knife were sheathed in the colourful silk sash that encircled his hips.

This brief inspection seemed to satisfy both parties quite sufficiently. 'You ought to take off that sarras, Signore,' said the stranger at last, 'its clinking might easily bring one of the sentries down on us, who would otherwise not have noticed us.'

'You may be right – but it is too late now, and I cannot take it off, Signor. Would you tell me your name, so that I know how to address you when we speak?'

'My name? *Per Bacco* – we won't be able to chat much on our journey. However – everyone must have some means of addressing one another, so I might as well tell you mine. My name is Antonelli!'

"Good heavens – a namesake of the Cardinal?"

"A real cousin, Signore, if you don't mind! We're both from Terra-cina, and Giacomo

[49]

could certainly have become an excellent brigand or smuggler, like his brother, had he not happened to enter the clergy. But as I'm not proud of my family connections and prefer to keep them in reserve for when I might actually find myself in danger of the garrotte[1], my friends and I prefer to call me Tonelletto."

"Tonelletto?"

"*Yes, Signore.* It's as good a name as any!"

'But I heard that name in Rome, mentioned by the garrison officers as belonging to one of the most notorious brigand chiefs of the western Apennines?!'

The Italian shrugged. "*Cospetto* – what can I do about it? Those frog-eaters, the French, make a mountain out of a molehill and begrudge a poor devil

[1] The Roman execution machine.

the slightest bit of credit, whilst they themselves are brigands on a grand scale! – But I think there's your horse coming."

Indeed, a gendarme was approaching from the side of the Palazzo on a simply saddled horse of genuine English breed.

At the same time, artillery and several field wagons from Pimodan's column rattled down the street and broke through the crowd of onlookers gathered in the cathedral square. An orderly rode ahead of them, leading them to the spot not far from the monastery where the fleet of wagons and the guns were stationed. Between the baggage and ammunition carts stood a half-open travelling carriage. On the box beside the [50]
coachman sat the short, agile figure of a courier, with a golden greyhound embroidered on the left sleeve of his jacket; at times, despite all the coachman's protests, he would use his whip on the two weary horses, but even more so his tongue, which seemed inexhaustible in its exclamations and orders, which he mixed together in five different languages.

On the back seat of the carriage sat a tall, gaunt figure with a white goatee and a yellow coat that reached down to his heels; in the rear, a lady wrapped in her Scottish cloak, her face concealed by the veil of her bonnet.

The carriage stopped in the middle of the street and was soon surrounded by soldiers and beggars, of whom there are countless numbers in Loreto. The little courier was a whirl of activity.

'Could you recommend a good inn to me?[1] *– Aussitôt, Madame, vous pouvez en reposer en-me! Riposatevi sopra me!*[2] – He beckoned to a lad who was hobbling on two crutches and, whimpering pitifully, held out his tattered hat for alms. *'Av-vicinatevri di me!* These stupid people here don't understand their own language! The fellow may look like the worst vagabond, but *lo tengo por hombre de bien!*[3] *and we need to find a hotel for Mylady and we want to sup!*
[51]

The little man's fanciful antics were brought to an end by the lady's tall valet, to whom she had spoken a few words in English.

Without further ado, the tall man grabbed the little man by the collar and held him fast.

'Master Jean!'

"*Master Wilkens?*"

"My lady says you should ask the soldiers if they know a gentleman by the name of Terenz O'Donnell?"

'Nonavete ch'a comandare! Messieurs, avez-vous compris?' He repeated the lady's question in French and Italian.

It was repeated amid laughter. Everyone hastened to call out: 'Where is Monsieur O'Donnell? Who knows Signor Terentio O'Donnell?' –

Meanwhile, the gendarme had brought the saddled horse to the two men who were waiting for it. As he handed the reins to the officer, he recognised the officer's companion.

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[1] Can you point us to a good inn?

[2] Leave it to me.

[3] I take him to be an honest chap.

‘*By Bacchus* – Tonelletto, is it really you?’

“*Yes, Signor Sergeant!* In the flesh!”

“But lad, you do know there’s a hundred scudi on your head?”

“*Yes, yes!* So what! But times have changed, and I’m now in the service of His Holiness just as much as you are! Look at that – my handsome officer is flirting with a nun and wasting his time on it.”

The Irishman had walked up to the monastery gate with his horse by the reins, rung the bell, and the
[52]
gatekeeper. Immediately afterwards, a girl dressed in the outer robe of the lay sisters had come out and offered him her hand.

‘What do you want, Terenz?’ It was the young Irishwoman.

“Darling,” said the officer, “I only have a few moments and just wanted to say goodbye to you. A mission is taking me away for tonight, and probably tomorrow as well. In any case, you’ll stay here at the convent until I send word to you, unless . . . ”

“What, Brother? You’re frightening me!”

“Bah – nothing! Have the few belongings from my quarters fetched this very evening. In this wallet are the papers relating to the small sum we deposited with the banker in Rome, and here” – he pressed his purse into her hand – “I’ve shared it fairly.”

“Terenz – where are you going?”

“Wherever duty calls me. Such is the lot of a soldier, and now, be a strong girl; you know we’re on our own in this world. May Saint Patrick and the Blessed Virgin watch over you! Hey – who’s calling my name?”

It was at that very moment that, in response to the courier’s question, the group of beggars and soldiers gathered round the carriage hastened to shout for Signor O’Donnel[l].

‘*Hell and damnation!*’ cursed the Irishman, staring at the group, brightly lit by the nearest fire and a few torches – ‘May Saint Patrick take my soul
[53]
a thousand years in Purgatory if that isn’t Miss Judith herself!” He seized the
horse’s reins and placed his foot in the stirrup.

The lady’s carriage was almost overrun by the throng of beggars, who swore by a hundred oaths that they would seek out the Signore at once and bring him here, if Her Excellency would only be so gracious as to give them a few bajocchi on account. The frightened lady’s attempt to throw a handful of coins from her purse into the crowd only made matters worse, for everyone was now jostling around the carriage; the coachman used his whip in vain to make headway, whilst the courier railed in vain in five or six languages at the laughing soldiers, who formed a circle around the travellers and would not give way or budge, until the Prince—who was still standing nearby and had been observing the officer’s behaviour—maliciously pointed out to those standing nearest that the man they were seeking was just about to mount his horse at the monastery gate.

The cry: *‘Arrestate Signori! Ferma! Ferma!* A lady wishes to speak to you!’ spread
like wildfire, and the blind and the lame hurried off, with eyes and feet as sound as any, to fetch the man who had been spotted.

The unfortunate suitor heard the shouts with genuine horror, even though he did not understand them – but he saw the lady in the carriage lean forward and point with her hand to her old servant, indicating the spot where the siblings were standing.
[54]
With a blasphemous curse, he leapt into the saddle. '*Farewell, Mary!*' His spurs dug into the flanks of the noble steed, which shot forward, knocking half a dozen men and women to the ground. Pursued by laughter, insults and curses, the Irishman galloped off down the road, barely taking the time to call out to the guide. The crowd and the obstacle in his path blocked his way – right in front of him stood one of the ammunition carts that had just arrived with the General's convoy. A click of the tongue, spurs into the flanks, and with a mighty leap the noble horse and its mad rider flew over the cart.

Loud cheers, clapping and cries of 'Evviva!' followed him as he vanished down the alleyway like a whirlwind. The venerable smuggler and brigand, the cousin of the all-powerful Eminence, hastened to follow him.

From the great portal of the cathedral—built by Pope Paul II in 1467 and completed under Julius II in 1513—the military music rang out merrily and rousingly. From the wide-open bronze doors, adorned with reliefs by the Lombardi brothers and Tiburzio Vercelli, a stream of light poured forth, reaching the bronze statue of Pope Sixtus V, crafted by the masterful hand of Calcagni. The ranks of soldiers closed – the officers' command rang out loudly across the square.

'Attention! Present arms!'

The butt plates clattered against the stocks – the drummers beat – [55]

Twelve choirboys emerged in pairs from the cathedral's portal, holding burning wax candles in their hands, and lined up on the steps.

Then came the deacons and vicars of the Santa Casa, taking their places on either side of the portal, from which now emerged the ten bearers of the flags and horse-tails that had been taken from the papal galleys on 7 October 1571 in the Gulf of Patras (Lepanto) under the valiant imperial bastard from the Turkish admiral Ali, whose waters had been reddened by the blood of 15,000 infidels.

Surrounded by the canons, the generals and staff officers, the delegate followed, holding the monstrance, resplendent with diamonds and sparkling gemstones.

He came to a halt beneath the portal of the mighty cathedral, whilst the standard-bearers stood to attention before the statue of Sixtus V.

The surging crowd had pushed the young Irishwoman away from the convent entrance – though the forgivable curiosity and thrill-seeking nature of a worldly young woman may well have played their part. The convent habit was a little too ordinary to have caused a stir, particularly at a time such as the present; nevertheless, she struggled in vain to escape the crush until a helping hand supported her and drew her – rather than led her – beneath the solitary arcades of the closed market halls.

The young Irishwoman recognised the uniform of a senior officer and was just about to thank him for his kind protection when she realised that he was by no means
[56]

had been performed so selflessly, for the Knight of the Church tried to draw her towards him and wrap his arms round her.

‘Don’t resist, child,’ whispered the officer frivolously in Italian – ‘I know this from Naples! *Cospetto!* – once you little holy witches have slipped out of custody, you’ll be running wilder than the wildest ballerina from San Felice!’

Although the girl did not understand enough Italian to fully grasp the infamy of his words, she nevertheless easily understood their intent. ‘Let me go, sir,’ she said in French, – ‘or I shall have to call for help! Your behaviour is unworthy of an officer!’

‘Demonio! – Indeed – it is the beautiful Irishwoman or Parisian!’ cried her assailant,
‘All the better, my little beauty! Your so-called brother has run off, so you’re free! Come with me; I’m not stingy, and you won’t lose out!’

This time she had understood the words spoken in French. Her reply, despite the air of gentleness and humility she wore, was dictated by her hot Hibernian blood: a slap in the face and a cry for help.

‘Scoundrel! How dare you do this to me?!’

He raised his clenched fist to strike her brutally; but a strong hand seized his arm and held him back.

‘You are behaving like a scoundrel, Signor!’ said a stern voice. ‘Leave at once, or I shall repeat the well-deserved chastisement that this lady has inflicted upon you.’
[57]

The Italian was seething with rage. “Why are you meddling in matters that are none of your business?
Do you know who you’re talking to?”

“To a wretch who wants to abuse a defenceless woman because she rejected his filthy advances.”

‘I am the Principe *Caracciolo!* Since I see that you are an officer, you will make amends to me for your insults! Right this instant!’

The officer had drawn the lady’s arm beneath his own. “I am Baron von Kerssen,” he said proudly, “but I shall not duel with you.”

“Ah – I see!” said the Neapolitan scornfully, “the honourable Cavalier who was once driven out of the Prussian army for cowardly refusing to offer satisfaction!”

‘Which of us two is the coward will be revealed tomorrow on the battlefield, to which both our lives belong. It is there alone that I accept your challenge; for I did not leave the foremost army in Europe to renounce my principles here for the sake of a comrade of the traitor Vial. – Come, madam, you shall return safely to the convent under my protection!’

Without sparing the slightest sign of attention to his teeth-grinding opponent, he led the girl away. – – –

Once more the drums thundered, the [58]
white cauldrons, and the entire crowd gathered before the cathedral—soldiers and common folk alike—fell reverently to their knees before the raised Blessed Sacrament.

The Holy Father's delegate blessed the warriors of the Church for the impending battle! –

LAZIENKI.

1. THE BLACK BROTHERHOOD.

That beautiful, mild autumn day – it was Wednesday, 24 October – had been followed by a gentle, fine rain, which had now ceased, giving way to a bright, clear, sunny sky.

The whole of Warsaw was in a state of agitation – one half revelling in the splendour of the imperial court and the numerous princely guests, – the other resenting it and hatching sinister plans.

It was at the time of that meeting of the three representatives of the old Holy Alliance, which had been torn apart by the Treaty of Paris – the second generation of those princes who had formed the mighty alliance that had secured peace in Europe for 35 years. The mighty waves of events, which had undermined and shaken all the foundations of the former order, demanded of the powerful of the earth—to whom God had entrusted the destinies of nations—new agreements and new alliances to withstand the onslaught of the revolutions in
[60]
purple as in the blouse, and to be able to steer the drive for reform into a fruitful channel.

The meeting followed those between the Prince Regent of Prussia and the Emperor of Austria on 25 July in Teplitz, and with the Queen of England on 12 October in Coblenz, and had been the subject of discussion in diplomatic circles and the newspapers for some time beforehand. France's efforts to thwart it had proved in vain.

On the 20th, the Emperor of Russia and the Grand Duke, heir to the throne, had arrived in Warsaw – the former accompanied by his princely guests from a hunting expedition in the Bialowieza Primeval Forest; the following day, the Prince Regent of Prussia arrived, and on Monday, the Emperor of Austria. Since then, military displays on the Powązki Field and splendid festivities had followed one after another.

On the very day on which we enter more closely into the scene of these festivities, a large live-fire manoeuvre had taken place at midday – the ministers, each of whom was accompanied by one of the three monarchs, had paid each other a visit that morning.

It was 8 o'clock in the evening – and so, at this time of year, already completely dark. The staff officers, the leading figures of the civil service, and high society had been invited to the festivities at Lazienki, which began with a performance of the ballet *The Sea Robber* in the charming park theatre by the Great Basin, and concluded with a magnificent display of illuminations
[61]
of the park. Half of Warsaw had poured out along the Grand Avenue and Wiejska Street to witness the enchanting spectacle, for the secret machinations of the 'Reds' had not yet gained the hold over the people that would later allow them to restrict even the public's curiosity to the agenda of the revolution. –

Along Zakrocymska Street, from the area of the Citadel—which, having been enlarged, now dominates the entire city—came two men wrapped in dark coats; they would occasionally stop at one corner or another of the side streets that joined it and, as they passed by, exchange a few brief words with people who seemed to be loitering there by chance or going about some business. The words were so fleeting and inaudible that even the nearest passers-by could not have understood them, nor could they have noticed them at all. Their conversation with one another, too, consisted only of disjointed, indifferent remarks, and only occasionally did a word slip out that seemed to belong to a train of thought entirely different from the indifferent conversation they were conducting for the benefit of the passers-by; for, despite the general exodus towards Lazienki, the street was very busy, as some of the troops who had carried out the manoeuvres at midday had been given permission to stay behind after the retreat.

The two men we were accompanying were of different builds and different age. One was tall and slender, wore a hat and, as the light from the gas lantern revealed as they passed, appeared to be about twenty-six years old. His face was narrow, pale and of [62] aristocratic features; a narrow black moustache hung in long points over the corners of his finely chiselled mouth, in the Polish manner – fiery dark eyes scanned the street somewhat restlessly and searchingly throughout the entire journey.

The second man, who was shorter, was probably twenty years older than his companion – he had an intelligent, sharp face covered in smallpox scars, and the strength of his prominent lower features spoke of great willpower. He wore a cap in the style of the service caps worn by railway officials, but without their insignia. He was the one who exchanged brief words with people on the street corners. These seemed, incidentally, to serve as a sort of guide, for the two repeatedly altered the direction of their walk accordingly, turning into side streets and, after a longer stretch, returning to a main road.

Passing the Bernardine monastery, they were about to turn towards the Carmelites when a lame, ragged lad, carrying an open basket hanging from a cord round his neck containing lemons, cigars, matchboxes and similar small wares, stopped beside them, exchanged a quick, brief glance of understanding with the older man, and then cried out in a plaintive tone:

‘Cigars! Cigars! Three kopecks a piece! Buy! Buy!’

The older man stopped. ‘I’ve forgotten my cigar case,’ he said aloud. ‘Do you have anything like that with you?’ [63]

“No, I don’t smoke!”

“Then allow me to buy a few. Come here, lad. Show me the best ones! – – What do you have?” he added quietly.

‘Here you are, my good sir! May the Mother of God bless you – this is the first money I’ve ever earned!’ whimpered the lad, then added in a whisper: ‘The monastery is under guard – I’ve been told to warn you – the whole police force is out in force!’

‘How much are the cigars?’

‘Six kopecks for the best sort – if Your Grace would buy a couple for my starving mother and five poor siblings, God will reward you. – Go via Mazowiecka[1]; they’re as wild as the devil because of yesterday’s prank!’

“Here – light this for me! – And today?”

“Here you are, sir! – They’re supposed to find the plot in Łazienki itself! We wouldn’t be Poles if we didn’t outwit them! – May the Mother of God bless you, sirs, for your gift!”

Those last loud words were meant for the ears of a drunken peasant who staggered past them and came to a halt.

The lad, whose small, shrewd eyes darted about from his rat-like face beneath the grubby, tattered fur cap, had noticed that the drunken peasant was casting an attentive glance at the
[64]
group, and so he quickly snuffed out the match that was still burning.

‘You son of a dog, you simpleton!’ cried the farmer – ‘Can’t you see my pipe’s gone out? – No offence, Your Grace – a poor chap’s got to treat himself when the whole of Warsaw is celebrating! Long live Poland! I kiss Your Grace’s coat! Don’t you have a little something, old chap, for a glass of Wutki?”

He performed the salute, that half-prostration typical of the lower classes in Poland, in which they kiss the coat, whilst trying to lift the larger man’s overcoat.

The man with the smallpox scar pushed him away. “Get out of here, you drunken scoundrel, or I’ll call the police!”

The peasant had achieved his aim – he’d spotted a small travel bag under the coat and staggered on.

‘Watch out – a spy!’ whispered the lame boy as he squeezed past the two men.

The drunken farmer had already staggered a few steps further – the two men continued on in the opposite direction.

At one point, they looked back at the suspicious man. He had just stumbled and fallen to the ground; a few passers-by were trying to help him back on his feet. That put their minds at rest. “For all his cleverness, Janko was wrong this time,” said the older man, “the lame lad suspects spies everywhere – because he himself is one of our best.”

Had he been able to see – or rather, hear – what was
happening in the [65]
group gathered round the drunkard, he would not have been so unconcerned.

It is by no means a rare occurrence in Warsaw for a drunkard to fall into the gutter – people help him – because the same thing might well happen to most of them tomorrow – at most, they pull him out, lean him against the nearest wall and leave him to make his own way on as he sees fit. That is exactly what happened this time too – the three or four people helped the farmer to his feet and carried on their way, with the exception of one man who looked like an ordinary citizen.

This man wanted to set the drunkard down on a doorstep and, whilst doing so, was searching his pockets with great dexterity when he suddenly felt his hand gripped as if by an iron clamp.

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[1] In the place names, *‘Ulica’* should be read as ‘street’. *‘Mazowiecka ulica’*: Masurian Street.

‘Don’t make a fool of yourself, Vasili,’ said the supposed drunkard quietly but in a perfectly calm voice. ‘You’ll find nothing on me but a few punches at most. Watch out, there’s trouble ahead!’

“*Niebiski ojcze!*[1] The Commissioner!”

“Himself. Now, quickly! Do you see those two men just rounding the corner there?”

“The ones in coats?”

“Yes! Follow them quickly – but be careful – I need to know where they’re going. Report back in an hour at the corner of the Brühl Palace! – Go!”

The police officer in civilian clothes [66]
set off immediately. The other man made his way towards the nearest open gateway. In the shadow behind the gate, a rapid transformation took place. From beneath his litefka, he pulled out a tightly compressed parcel, opened it and unfolded a blouse of the sort usually worn by German and French labourers, and pulled it over his short, sleeveless Polish jacket, which resembled a waistcoat more than anything else. Just as quickly, he pulled his trousers out of his boots and over them – the low hat with the wide brim was crumpled up and shoved under the blouse, and he put on an ordinary peaked cap. The man, so swiftly transformed, was just about to complete the disguise by attaching a thick moustache when – glancing round by chance – he realised he had been overheard.

The sly face of the lame boy grinned from around the door; he had been watching the transformation. The lad did indeed recoil when he saw the official’s gaze fixed upon him and tried to make a hasty getaway, but with a single leap the man had him by the collar.

‘*Sukin syn!*[2] What are you doing here?’

Whether it was fear or a certain malice that put the words into the caught boy’s mouth, his reply was: ‘You wanted fire from me earlier, when you were still a farmer!’

A blow to the back of the neck was his reward for
that reply. The [67]
boy screamed at the top of his voice: “Help! Help! – A Russian! A Russian!”

People stopped in their tracks. ‘What has the lad done? Why are you beating him?’

‘Shut your mouth, you scoundrel!’ But the lad screamed even louder than before.

The police officer slammed his fist into the boy’s face, sending blood gushing from his mouth and nose.

The boy’s violent jerk had also snapped the strap by which he wore the basket containing his small wares around his neck. It fell to the ground, spilling all the items onto the pavement. At the same time, however, a host of printed leaflets, which had been hidden at the bottom of the basket, fluttered out onto the pavement. The policeman’s eye fell upon the papers like that of a hawk, whilst the boy’s face turned deathly pale beneath the blood. The policeman bent down to pick up one of the

[1] Heavenly Father!

[2] Son of a bitch!

papers and picked it up, whilst some of those gathering round did the same, and unfolded it. It bore the headline: ‘Poland!’

‘Ha – scoundrel – we’ve finally caught the criminals!’ He pulled out a small silver whistle hanging from a cord round his neck and blew a shrill whistle, at the same time gripping the boy’s collar more tightly. But the lad knew full well what was at stake, and before the inspector knew it, he was left holding only the torn jacket, whilst the boy, whose legs had suddenly become perfectly healthy again, slipped away

[68]

like a weasel between the feet of the onlookers and ran off down the nearest side street. The officer tried to give chase, but the crowd prevented him, mostly on purpose, it seemed, and by the time he had cleared a path for himself, cursing and ranting and with the assistance of the police constables who had rushed over at the signal, the fugitive was long gone. At the same time, the people who had initially stopped hurriedly dispersed to avoid giving any evidence or even being arrested, and those who remained standing and gawped had no idea what was going on.

The Commissioner therefore had to content himself with ordering his subordinates to keep a close watch on the children going from door to door and to search them for the banned posters and leaflets which had been distributed throughout Warsaw since the Emperor’s arrival and which, despite all the police’s precautions, were found plastered up all over the city every morning, calling on the Polish population, high and low, not to take part in any of the festivities in honour of the ‘oppressors of Poland’. However, when the Commissioner then sought to have the leaflets that had been discovered collected, it transpired that not a single one could be found; and when the police later searched many of the small wandering street vendors, they found nothing in the least suspicious on any of them. – Meanwhile, the two men had continued on their way, which took them across the square in front of the Royal Palace, the residence of the Prince-Governor.

‘Last night,’ said the elder man mockingly, as he [69]

stopping in front of the large open courtyard, “last night these windows shone with a different splendour, and yet we have spoiled it for them.”

‘How so? I read the telegram on the way that a grand ball was to take place yesterday at Prince *Gortschakoff*’s.’

‘The great victor of Inkerman and Balaclava has made a fool of himself in the ballroom,’ said the other scornfully. ‘If he thinks our Polish women will be marched off to his balls like a column of Russian soldiers, he is mistaken. The entire officer corps was there, along with all the foreigners; the number of guests exceeded three hundred – and do you know how many ladies fit for dancing were among them?’

“Well? Our ladies are certainly keen enough to dance!”

“Twenty-five – that’s all! Of the Polish women, only Senator Potocka, Princess Lubomirska and Countess Kossakowska turned up – we shall remember that! – all the others had sent their apologies.”

“Of their own accord?”

“Bah – even patriotism must be taught and encouraged. Every fire needs its fuel. On Monday, they allowed their vanity to tempt them into attending the gala ballet at the Grand Theatre, despite the stench. As a result, when twenty or thirty of them returned home, they found their precious trinkets doused in oil and rendered useless. – We managed to get hold of the Prince’s guest list, and every lady received a notice by post at the same time informing her that her
[70]
would suffer the same fate if she dared to attend the Russian Ball or another gathering of foreigners.”

“Didn’t the police carry out any investigations into who was behind the ban?”

“Anitschkoff[1] is desperate to find out – but it has been to no avail. On the whole, the Russian police have been rather lax over the summer, and since the funeral of General’s wife Sowinski[2] we have been able to hold our demonstrations more or less undisturbed. Only now that the Tsar is here are they stirring up trouble on all sides, but it’s more noise than danger, for at least half of them are in our pay.”

They had walked on – a man was now following them cautiously at some distance, never losing sight of them.

Although the taller, younger man seemed to know his way about the streets perfectly well, he nevertheless left himself entirely in the hands of his companion. In the part of the city south of the Saxon Garden, which they had now entered, the latter took various twists and turns to thwart any chance of being spied on, until he finally entered the hallway of a house, on the ground floor of which was one of the numerous confectioners’ shops that Warsaw is teeming with.

They went through a door from the hallway into a
[71]
room behind the shop, which was empty of customers. The older man opened the entrance door a little and called out: ‘Black coffee – two!’

‘Coming right away, sir![3]

Two or three minutes later, a young girl brought what they had ordered. As she set it down in front of the gentlemen, she exchanged a meaningful glance with the older man.

‘Don’t worry, Wanda – he’s one of us. Who’s in the shop?’

“Oh, nobody! A couple of minor officials from the neighbourhood, reading the papers. – Everyone’s off to Lazienki.”

“And the Blacks?”

“They’re in their usual place. Asnik asked after you an hour ago. I don’t recognise this gentleman! Who is he?”

“He arrived from Paris an hour ago; not by the usual route, but on the St Petersburg railway. Count, allow me to introduce Miss von *Marowska*, one of our most loyal supporters.”

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[1] Chief of Police in Warsaw.

[2] The widow of the general of that name who fell during the storming of Wola in 1831. The funeral was used by the ‘Black Brotherhood’ as the first major demonstration by the nationalist party. The whole affair was a well-prepared charade.

[3] Sir!

The young chocolatier curtsied with all the grace of a lady of distinction. Only now did the stranger take a closer look at her.

She was one of those distinctive beauties found only among the purely Sarmatian tribe: of medium height, slender and delicate without being thin, with a narrow
[72]
pale face, a slightly curved nose, a low forehead and sparkling dark eyes; every one of her lively movements was graceful.

The Count rose and gave a courteous bow. 'Mr *Dubowski* has forgotten to introduce me,' he said, 'but to a patriot such as yourself, I must not stand on ceremony in giving my name. My name is Hypolit *Oginski*.'

'Count Oginski – the man exiled to Siberia?'

'I did indeed spend five years on the Yenisei catching sable and ermine for His Majesty the Emperor of Russia – but I returned during the great amnesty of '56. I am pleased that my name is not entirely unknown to you.'

'What true Polish woman would not know the man who dared, on an occasion such as today's[1], to reply to the tyrant Nicholas – still but a boy – with the words: "Poland's future lies not on the Neva, but in Paris!"'

The young lady's eyes sparkled with proud excitement at these words.

'You will already have realised, dear Count,' said Dubowski, 'that Miss von Marowska is no ordinary pastry chef's assistant; she took on this post two months ago out of patriotism, so as to be better able to guard the secret of our meetings.'
[73]

The Count bowed respectfully once more.

'Are you from the National Committee?'

'Yes, Miss!'

'Thanks be to the Blessed Virgin! Men like you are desperately needed to steer the agitation in the right direction. Unless the nobility and the patriots stand together, we shall never achieve victory. Don't look so gloomy, Dubowski – we all know that you and your brother are true Poles – but you yourself must admit that people like Adam Asnik cannot be the leaders of a nation fighting for its freedom!"

'Your zeal is getting the better of you,' said the brother of the professor who later became so well known.

"Give us the key – you might be missed at the front!"

The Polish woman turned away impatiently. "Just one more thing, Count. Is Miroslawski back in Paris?"

"He's still in Cuneo with Langiewicz at the Polish military academy."

"And why isn't he with Garibaldi?"

"You're forgetting, Panna, that Garibaldi is marching against the Pope."

"It's true – we Poles are in a dire situation. But someone's calling me – here's the key! Don't worry, now that I know you're with the group, I'll be keeping a close watch."

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[1] The meeting between King Frederick William IV and Emperor Nicholas on 18 May 1851 in Warsaw – a sad memory!

She hurried off; – Dubowski, who had already shown signs of impatience on several occasions, took the key. ‘These women are all the same,’ he said angrily – ‘they meddle
[74]
far too much in the conduct of politics, instead of simply performing the duties for which they are, admittedly, excellent. Come, Count, we have already wasted too much time.’ He opened a door at the back of the room, walked down a small, dark corridor and climbed about ten steps to a short passageway leading to an outbuilding.

The door to this passageway was locked. He unlocked it with the key he’d received from the girl – by the light of a lamp, the Count saw that on the inside, a wide hasp had been fitted to the doorframe and the door itself, so that the door could be barred with a wooden beam.

Dubowski knocked twice with a quick tap on the door of the room opposite, which was opened immediately.

The two of them stepped inside.

It was a sparsely furnished, smoke-filled room with a small cabinet. A fire was burning in the fireplace; a copper kettle for boiling water hung above it, and the pungent smell of punch and grog, which filled the room along with tobacco smoke, showed that those present had already made ample use of them. Various items of clothing hung on the walls, interspersed with a pair of rapiers and a cavalry sabre – on the other side, a pair of pistols of exquisite workmanship, which did not at all fit in with the otherwise shabby state of the room.

There were five people present, all men of varying ages. The youngest of them was at most 24 years old, with a gaunt, sunken and
[75]
ugly face, but large, sparkling eyes from which a wild energy shone. He had taken off his coat and seemed about to prepare another round of the strong drink. Two others were also still young men, wearing student caps and Polish laced coats, and had a rather wild, world-weary appearance. The fourth was an old man of at least sixty, wearing a fur coat which he had not taken off even in the stifling heat of the room. Beneath his long white hair was a face of genuine Polish features, deeply furrowed by grief or suffering—probably both. His bloodshot eyes seemed unable to tolerate the light of the lamp burning on the table, for they blinked incessantly. The last of the party was a man of refined, stately bearing. He was dressed in a modern and tasteful manner, in his early thirties, and his broad forehead and
calm, steady, grey eyes betrayed intelligence and a keen power of observation.

‘At last, Dubowski,’ said the pale man, who was the occupant of the room and seemed to hold a certain authority over the others—or at least presumed to do so—‘we have been expecting you for some time, as you know what is to take place today. Is this Count Oginski?’

‘At your service, sir! I greet you, though I have not yet had the honour of making your acquaintance!’ The old man had risen and was looking him firmly in the face. ‘Nor mine, Count?’
[76]

The young man stared at him for a long time and placed his hand on his forehead, as if to gather and hold on to a memory. ‘How is it that – this face –’

"Have you so quickly forgotten the mines of Nerchinsk[1]?"

'Good heavens – you are the unfortunate exile whom, after three years, they brought up from those dreadful depths into the light of the sun for the very first time, so that you might bid your dying wife a final farewell on God's beautiful earth?!'

'And I found you at the bedside of my dying wife, you yourself on your way to the banks of the Lena; and often, Count, when I later pushed heavy ore carts through the deep silver shafts once more, the memory of your young face made the darkness brighter than the dim light of the miner's lamp.'

The Count was deeply moved as he shook the unfortunate man's hand. "Thank God that we have nevertheless found each other again in our homeland. But your name, sir! You know, you were not allowed to tell me it back then?"

'You are right, Count – back then I was nothing more than the mere number one thousand and fifteen! If you wish to know my name, ask the younger generation here.'

'It is Michael *Garzynski!*' said Dubowski with profound solemnity. [77]

"What – the poet of **Orzeł biały**? – Rybinski's unfortunate friend? – Then allow me, singer of my homeland, to kiss the hand that, for twenty-five years in distant Siberia, mined the silver with which Russia paid the mercenaries who keep the Polish eagle in chains!"

He had bent down to the old man's hand and kissed it before the old man could prevent him.

'There are more patriots, Count, who are waiting to make your acquaintance,' said the old man, 'though perhaps none has as much right to do so as I. Here—' he pointed to the pale landlord of the lodgings, 'is *Adam Prot Asnik*; though merely a medical student, he is a giant of energy and enthusiasm for the people's sacred cause, and the leader of the Black Brotherhood. These two gentlemen are also members of the same organisation, *Stephan Lobrowski* and *Oskar Aweide*, and this gentleman here –" he pointed to the serious, elegant man – "is the secretary of the Agricultural Society, which the Tsar's ukas seeks to put a stop to, the inventor of the 'Tener', *Agathon Maikowski*."

'But where are Khmelnitsky and Father Hilarius?' asked Dubowski.

'The Father is probably hearing the confessions of some Russian ladies,' said the student Lobrowski with a laugh, 'and Ignaz –'

'Well?'

'He is already in Łazienki to [78] who have chosen to run to the oppressor's court. Wielopolski and his party had best watch out for him."

Those present had gathered round the table; Asnik offered the Count a glass of the hot, strong punch.

'And now the question – how are things in Paris, and what news do you bring from St Petersburg? Indeed, it could scarcely have occurred to the Russian police that an envoy from the Central Committee would make his way from Paris via St Petersburg!'

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[1] The famous lead and silver mines in eastern Siberia, a common place of exile.

“First of all – here are three letters from the Prince, which you are to deliver before I introduce myself to the recipients.”

Asnik took them.

“To Mikoszewski? He’s of no consequence! To the Colonel? Well, he’s here, in the Tsar’s retinue! And to the Margrave? Do you also know that he is distrusted?”

“The letter contains only general matters.”

“Well, in any case, we mustn’t fall out with him just yet. And what does the Central Government think about the timing of the uprising?”

‘I am to persuade you, under all circumstances, to wait. Neither the Prince nor the People’s Party consider the moment favourable, as the Emperor must focus all his attention on the Italian movement and the stance of the three Powers. Even the Prince advises waiting until the

[79]

‘We must wait and see how events in Europe unfold and for the war that is bound to break out. You know that the revolution was originally scheduled for 1 May 63, and that agreeing to a shorter timeframe is merely a concession to your insistence. However, it seems impossible to us to begin the struggle now; rather, we must use this time to make all the necessary preparations.’

‘Wait and wait some more!’ cried the student Lebrowski, ‘the nobility can wait – but the people cannot!’

“Judging by all the reports, I believe that the nobility will actually be more ready than the people! But it is essential that both join forces if Poland’s old misfortune is not to be repeated. I have been instructed to find out exactly how your forces are organised and to support them with the necessary resources.”

‘Are you bringing money?’

‘I have with me instructions for one hundred thousand guilders from Paris and five thousand roubles in gold from the Committee in St Petersburg.’

‘Give us the gold for the time being – my flat is secure,’ said the President of the Blacks hastily. A gentle nudge from Maikowski under the table, however, urged the Count to be cautious.

‘I shall deposit it with you, Mr Asnik,’ he said, ‘as soon as we are ready. Two new consignments of weapons have set sail for Danzig on English coal ships – the endorsements for the coal are due to arrive any day now. You may decide how far up the Vistula they are to go. Our friends

[80]

in St Petersburg are active – the Nihilists are spreading ever further and becoming better organised. They are ready to work hand in hand with us, but they too believe that the time is not yet ripe!”

‘Damn this hesitation!’

“Very well, sir – so tell me what the situation is here and how far the preparations have progressed.”

“Maikowski will do that – he’s the most familiar with it.”

Lobrowski stood up. “I don’t think we’ll be needed here,” he said, “we must go to Lazienki. Do you have any money, Adami?”

"*May the devils take* me*!* I'm as penniless as a church mouse! Ask Maikowski; he always knows what to do – that's what being a tax official is for!"

'If I can be of service,' said the Count courteously, placing his purse, filled with gold, on the table. 'Help yourselves as you please – we'll settle up later.'

Lobrowski promptly took twenty imperials from the purse – a manoeuvre which Asnik watched with dark, envious glances – and then returned the purse. "Will you come with us, Pan Garczynski?"

The old exile seemed to want to stay, but Maikowski gave him a nod. "Come with us, my friend
[81]
and make sure the young people don't do anything foolish!" The old man shook the Count's hand. "Have you found accommodation yet?"

"No – however, I have sufficient papers; I shall go to a hotel."

"Those are overcrowded and you'll find it hard to get a room there. If you're willing to make do with a small room—which, whilst not very comfortable, is certainly safe—I can offer you one in the house of my relative, the wife of the chemist Muklianowicz, on Marschall Street."

The Count thanked him warmly, explaining that he would take up the offer if necessary, and the three men took their leave.

'*Dobrze!*' said the young president of the Blacks, stretching out his legs. 'Now we're among ourselves! Fill the glasses, Dubowski, and you, Maikowski, get on with it!'

The Count turned to the latter. However little he had seen of the goings-on of this democracy so far, it was already beginning to disgust him, and he wondered what would become of the great work of national liberation if its leadership were in the hands of dissolute students and similarly inexperienced and dubious individuals. Only the calm, considered manner displayed by the former tax official restored some of his confidence.

Maikowski seemed, incidentally, to notice this impression, for he adapted his account accordingly. It was clear
[82]
and comprehensive, and in no way spared the nationalists.

'You know,' he said, 'that the Polish uprising had already been decided upon before 1858 by the émigrés and the patriots here at home. Russia was exhausted by the Crimean War, France was all-powerful – and we could count with certainty on intervention by England and Emperor Napoleon. However, immediately after the war we were still too far behind, and, whilst awaiting a new one, we had to content ourselves with influencing European public opinion from Paris, London and Switzerland through manifestos and petitions. The Mazzinian League let us down, as did Hungary – it selfishly concerned itself only with the Italian movement. Meanwhile, our press has worked vigorously, and German democracy has been of great use to us in this regard. There is still a party in Prussia dating back to '48 which bitterly hates the monarchy and will openly extend its hand to us the moment we are victorious. The alliance between Russia and Prussia

[1] May the devil take you!

is far more dangerous to us there than that with Austria, inasmuch as, sooner or later, the national movements are certain to triumph.

Enough – we have no time today to delve into broader political prospects. The Lombard War of ’59 came upon us unexpectedly – its swift conclusion even more so. But what opportunities we lost as a result, we have more than made up for through the upheaval in Russia itself. Even though Bakunin is still languishing in Siberia, Herzen in London

[83]

is keeping the whole movement going, and I believe – we shall hear of important developments before long! –»

‘What do you mean?’

‘It is a conjecture – but even emperors are mortal men! The signs of this movement, the rivalry between the German and Old Muscovite factions in St Petersburg, which is even dividing the Tsar’s own family, and Emperor Alexander’s philanthropic idea of abolishing serfdom, have diverted the Russian government’s attention from Poland for the past year. Gortschakoff, the governor, is as inept a politician as he was an inept military commander. We have used this time to place as many reliable patriots as possible in all parts of the province. The transfer of railway construction to French and English companies – the most foolish blunder the government could have committed – has opened up a wealth of resources for us. At least half the officials on the railways and telegraph services are on our side. Secret committees already exist in every town – many Russian officials belong to the reformist faction, and we even have many sympathisers amongst the military!«

‘But what about the people – the peasants?’

‘That is the tricky part,’ said Dubowski. ‘The peasant has learnt to hate the nobleman, and imagines that with the abolition of serfdom, the nobleman’s estates will also fall to him. He does not trust the Russian enticements!’

[84]

“But that means an army without soldiers!”

‘The devil take their mothers!’ shouted the student, pounding wildly on the table. ‘We’ll force those scoundrels into freedom, and set fire to their barracks over their heads if they refuse!’

“Our best help in this will be the clergy,” continued the tax official. “The provosts and the monastery clergy must use the confessional throughout the land to tell the people that they intend to take away their old faith and convert them to the Greek Church. We hope that this damned gathering in Lazienki does not, by any chance, lead to the monarchs taking the Pope under their wing, and that is why it must be broken up at all costs!”

“What – surely not by murder?”

‘And what would be wrong with that, Count?’ the student laughed scornfully. ‘The Russians hang the patriots; why should we shy away from a means by which many a country has already won its freedom!’

‘Not by assassination!’ said the Count firmly. ‘If you go down that road . . .’ Dubowski pushed the reluctant man back into his chair.

“You are mistaken, Count! I give you my word, that is not the intention – it is merely a matter of perhaps using intimidation or a demonstration to persuade the Tsar to break off the meeting and return to St Petersburg. – But do listen to Mr Maikowski.”

‘I hope,’ he continued, ‘that our organisation [85]
of the Ten will find the entire population—peasants, townspeople and nobles alike—ready for battle at the moment of decision.’

‘You mentioned the name earlier – what is this all about?’

‘Every member of the Comité had the duty to recruit nine comrades who would take on the same duty. In this way, the organisation grows to great size. All nine know only their own tenth, who in turn knows his own – thus the discovery and persecution of the organisation is very difficult, almost impossible, whilst the leaders of the association, that is to say, we, find it very easy to disseminate our orders.’

The Count was lost in thought. “Indeed, Mr Maikowski, this organisation is excellent, at least for influencing the people, although it will not suffice for swift action. A more direct and unconventional network is required.”

“That’s what the women are for!”

“The women?”

“Yes! Countess Dzembinska is at its head.”

‘The senator’s wife? – I remember her two daughters, who were still children at the time – Josepha and Lodoiska. They have surely grown into beautiful young ladies and true Polish women who would sacrifice their lives for their fatherland.’

‘If you harbour any old feelings for them,’ the student interjected mockingly, ‘you’re too late. Gortschakof’s aide-de-camp, Prince Ylinski, is making
[86]
courting the elder one very earnestly, and Lodoiska intends to enter a convent.”

‘I need not harbour any designs on either of the young ladies,’ said the Count coldly, ‘to be a friend of the family. The late Senator’s estate bordered on ours. What are your further plans, sir?’

‘It is this! To place the entire administration and the police of Warsaw in the hands of the National Party—that will be the nobility’s task, and Wielopolski is enthusiastic about the idea. He hopes that this alone will restore Poland’s former independence—at the very least, he will be working to our advantage. At the moment of the uprising, we will then have a host of reliable people in all the government departments. The Russian treasury itself will provide us with the funds – we will have the power to bring about the state’s bankruptcy in an instant by making all deposits vanish, whilst all the stock exchanges are flooded with counterfeit banknotes.”

‘That is Herzen’s plan. As a soldier, I refused to have anything to do with it.’

“The dissemination by Jewish agents has already begun – the secret establishment in London has promised to supply fifty million roubles in counterfeit notes by the end of 1861 – not even the most well-founded state can withstand such a fact, let alone Russia’s ruined financial situation.”

“It is a sad measure,” replied the Count,

[87]
“but I fear it cannot be dismissed out of hand. I have seen samples of the notes in the Prince’s salon in Paris, and I must admit, they are deceptively realistic. But tell me a little about what is initially intended.”

‘The Russian authorities have indeed banned the spread of the agronomic society, yet it is – – – Devil, what’s all that noise?’

The door was flung open violently – the fake shop assistant from the confectioner’s rushed in, flushed with excitement – her bosom heaving and her breath coming in gasps.

“Run! Run! – The police! – Save him! Through the window!” – Without waiting for a reply, she leapt back into the corridor and threw the lamp to the floor.

The following had taken place in the confectioner’s shop.

The flow of customers had remained sparse – Wanda had noticed nothing out of the ordinary, even though she was observing everything with the utmost care.

There were three people present whom she already recognised from frequent visits, when a stranger in ordinary civilian clothing entered, ordered a cup of tea, and picked up one of the small daily newspapers, the **Gazeta Warszawska**.

There was nothing suspicious, nothing unusual about the man, and yet the young Polish woman’s attention was immediately drawn to him, for she had noticed that, upon entering, he had cast a sharp glance around the room, and near the door in the back room
[88]
. Incidentally, the door was now open and the room was empty.

The girl’s observation lasted about ten minutes, and the new guest had just stood up to take a fresh newspaper from the étagère at the front when the outer shop door was flung open and a ragged boy burst in. It was the same boy whom the police inspector had beaten up about an hour earlier at Bernhardiner Platz in the Krakauer suburb, and who had managed to escape so narrowly on that occasion.

The boy rushed over to the sales counter and whispered two words to the shop assistant:

‘Betrayal! The police!’

The man in the overcoat had heard her or guessed what was happening; he dropped the newspaper and leapt forward to block the back door, but the Polish woman was quicker than him. She darted like a startled bird towards the rear exit; yet, given his position, the man would probably have reached her first had the boy not thrown himself between his feet, causing him to tumble flat over him. He was quickly back on his feet and rushed after the girl, who had meanwhile gained the upper hand and locked the door to the stairwell behind her.

At the same time, whilst he was following the girl, calling out to her, the shop’s front door had been flung open and a whole troop of police officers and constables, led by the inspector who had made the initial discovery on Bernhardiner Square, burst in.
[89]

Janko had hurriedly hidden behind the shop counter, whilst the few innocent customers had jumped to their feet in fright.

The police officers heard their colleague calling out, saw him struggling with the locked door, and rushed to his aid.

Only one man remained inside the shop!

He was a man in his early twenties, of stocky build, with an unremarkable, bland face and very light blond hair.

The history of the last Polish uprising has preserved for him a dreadful, blood-soaked name.

When he found himself alone in the shop, whilst his companions, spurred on by the inspector, were busy trying to break down the door, he looked around cautiously and spotted the boy, who had just raised his head to see if the coast was clear. He immediately grabbed him by the ears and dragged him out.

'Ah, it's you, you rascal, what are you doing here?'

'Have mercy, Mr Karlowicz[1], surely you won't make a poor lad's life miserable!'

'Fool!' said the chief constable's officer quietly, 'get out of here, for Drosdowicz is leading the gendarmes.' – He shouted abuse at the lad and dragged him towards the door, as if he intended to hand him over to the guards standing outside. 'Off to Lazienki at once and
[90]
tell our people what's happened here!" He kicked him out through the door.

Meanwhile, the door to the corridor had been broken down; the police officers stormed through it, but at first, in the darkness, were unsure which way to turn.

A glimmer of light beneath the door—though it vanished immediately, extinguished by Wanda's decisive action—revealed the small staircase and the entrance to the corridor.

'Secure the exits! Bring torches – up these stairs here,' ordered Inspector *Drossdowicz*. 'Quick! Quick!' He was the first to leap up the steps and try to open the corridor door.

It gave way – but it did not open. – –

We mentioned earlier that the Polish woman, having warned the conspirators of the danger in just a few words, had hurried back into the corridor.

She wanted to lock the door from the inside – but the key was missing from the lock; Dubowski or Asnik must have forgotten to put it back. In a flash, she reached for the corner to lift the heavy wooden bolt standing there and place it in the clamps, but the officers were already storming up the steps, and lifting and sliding the heavy timber into place would have taken minutes.

The Polish woman knew that in those few minutes, those in danger – at least the strangers – could save themselves.
[91]

Then came one of those heroic acts of resolve and self-sacrifice of which only a woman wholly devoted to a cause is capable!

Whether the Polish lady was aware of the deed of the noble Scottish woman who thereby saved her persecuted king – we doubt it! But with equal devotion and resolve, she placed her left arm in the iron clamps of the door.

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[1] Pan Karlowicz, known as Pan the White, the future leader of the Keijalists – the dagger-men.

‘Open it in the name of the Emperor!’ thundered the commissioner. The door creaked – the Polish woman gritted her teeth – – –

———

Inside the room, Asnik had quickly leapt to a drawer, snatched out a bundle of papers and thrown it into the flames of the fireplace.

‘Get out – quickly – through the window! You know the way!’

Dubowski had already leapt into the bedroom and flung open the window, which looked out onto a small, dark side alley.

“Thank God – the way is clear – this way, Count!”

Maikowski ushered him into the room, whilst the student placed his foot on the papers in the embers. The Count was the first to leap out of the rather low window – Oginski followed him. Dubowski threw him the coat he’d grabbed.

‘My travelling bag!’ cried the Count from above.

A scream of excruciating pain rang out from the [92]
corridor – a second – then a kick flung the door to the room open – –

‘*Damn* it*!* – there they are – it’s too late!’ Dubowski followed those who had fled ahead with a swift leap.

When the Commissioner burst into the room, filled with the fumes of tobacco and punch and the smoke from burnt papers, the student was sitting quite comfortably on the old leather sofa, pipe in hand, staring at him.

‘In the name of the Emperor – I arrest everyone present!’

‘Slow down! Slow down, sir!’ said the Pole. ‘What are you doing here? You can see I’m alone!’

The second official, the same one who had followed the suspect and had been the first to enter the café, had rushed into the bedroom but returned immediately. “The window is open; they’ve slipped away!” he cried.

‘Damn it! But it smells of burnt paper in here. Out of the way, lad!’ He shoved aside the student, who had stood up and moved in front of the fireplace. “Paper has just been burnt here!” He rummaged through the embers, but could find only a few insignificant scraps. “Search the room thoroughly,” ordered the Commissioner, “and bring that woman here. – What’s your name?”

‘By what right do you ask me that? I am not your lackey and demand to be treated as an educated man!’

“Ho ho, lad – you’d better tone it down [93]
! I am the police commissioner of the First District. Your name?”

“Adam Prot Asnik, a medical student.”

“For the time being, we shall give you the opportunity to continue your studies elsewhere. Who has left this room? – There are still four glasses on the table, and everything indicates that several people were here a short while ago.”

“Fellow students who came to visit me.”

“Their names?”

“I don’t know them, and even if I did, I wouldn’t tell you. Go and find them yourselves!”

“We shall break your defiance. There’s the woman!”

Two gendarmes had brought the young Polish woman in; her face was deathly pale, but her dark eyes shone with unbroken courage, a certain joyful pride, when a glance confirmed to her that no one other than the student living here had been arrested. She was holding her left arm with her right hand; blood was flowing from the sleeve of her black silk dress and dripping onto the floor.

‘What about the girl?’ asked the inspector.

‘She is the one who warned the high traitors,’ said the second officer. ‘A rabble of lads tipped her off. She’s one of those fanatical women who cause us so much trouble.’

‘She’s bleeding—what’s happened? Go and check on her!’ said the inspector sympathetically. ‘She seems

[94]

not to belong, judging by your appearance, to the usual class of women who provide such services. What prompted you to interfere with the police’s measures against high treason?”

“Mr Asnik is no high traitor!” she said, her lips quivering with pain, whilst the gendarmes rolled back the sleeves of her dress.

“Then why did you warn him – why are you here?”

Her pale lips moved only reluctantly. She seemed to be forcing the words out with great effort, but she said in a firm voice: ‘Adam Asnik is my lover! He . . . ’ The inspector interrupted her. ‘Merciful God – quickly, send a doctor for the unfortunate woman!’

The sight was indeed gruesome. Her now-exposed forearm seemed to be held to its upper half by nothing but tendons and a bit of flesh; sharp splinters of bone protruded from the torn flesh, and blood was trickling down her motionless hand.

‘Here, Inspector,’ said one of the gendarmes, ‘I’ve found this travel bag under the chair. It isn’t large, but it’s full and quite heavy, as if there were money inside.’

The student let out a wild curse.

Wanda’s eyes met his – she realised that the bag they had found was connected to the fugitive agent of the Paris Central Committee

[95]

– a sombre nod from the President of the Black Brotherhood answered her questioning gaze.

‘Oh my God!’ – she wanted to clasp her hands – a terrible pain shot through her nerves at the involuntary movement – she fainted! –

2. The Diplomats.

After dinner at the Belvedere, the famous Warsaw Ballet had performed *The Pirate* in the small but splendid Orangery Theatre at Lazienki, which lies beside the great reflecting pool. The famous ballerina Strauß had at least delighted the Germans and Russians with her pirouettes and daring leaps, for the Poles were not clapping

where the others were applauding, and the curtain had fallen amid thunderous bravos following the battle of the ships and the collapse of the burning Turkish castle, to which the princely couple also joined in.

The theatre's grand doors began to pour the throng of guests out onto the forecourt, in front of which a large number of gleaming carriages awaited.

A fairy-tale sight met the eyes of those emerging. The whole of Lazienki Park seemed like an enchanted fairy tale from *One Thousand and One Nights* come to life. Whatever the
[96]
Whatever the wildest imagination could conceive in the splendour of an oriental illumination welled up from the darkness of the park—still largely leafy—in a colourful blaze of light, meeting the astonished gaze. High up in the treetops, amongst the foliage and on the branches, balloons floating in a riot of colour danced nimbly to and fro – the rigid yew hedges lining the straight avenues, trimmed in the old French style, glowed like walls of fire, whilst colourful Baroque chandeliers, composed of hundreds of lanterns, floated down from the dark canopy of the sky. One walked through fiery triumphal arches soaring to colossal heights, to catch sight in the distance of temples outlined in the most noble architectural flames, slender fire-minarets, and ornate, radiant Chinese towers. From the green bowling greens[!] sprang up colourfully sparkling groves of flowers, whilst colossal palm trees, gleaming like emeralds, soared upwards. These enchanting scenes were reflected in the still lake, upon whose waves of fire white swans glided in ghostly silence.

And rising from the very centre of the fiery lake stood the white marble palace of Lazienki, now the residence of the Austrian Emperor, aglow with the magical fire blazing all around. From the dark thickets, the harmonious sounds of hidden choirs brought the enchanting scene to life, captivating all the senses.

A vast crowd surged, like dark shadows, through this sea of flames; for the Emperor's express command had, despite the unsettling events of the past few days and the unmistakable mood
[97]
of the Polish population, the gates of the park stood wide open to all who wished to come and enjoy the spectacle. Alongside the soldiers' dark and gold-flecked uniforms, one could see the Litefka and the peasant's grubby fur coat, the Jew's black caftan – alongside the picturesque uniform of the Circassian, the Sunday best of the German citizen, the Polish laced coat, and the black silk or colourful, fur-trimmed kasaweika worn by the women and girls. The majority of the middle and lower classes had not yet been deterred by the veiled threats of the unknown agitators from indulging their curiosity.

Incidentally, there was by no means any shortage of grim, menacing faces gazing with scorn or hatred at all these splendid decorations and the cheerful crowd, and silently hurling wild curses after the carriages that were now leading the princely guests through the avenues ablaze with fireworks.

The Smolensk Uhlans, the regiment of the Grand Duke's heir to the throne, formed the guard of honour in the park, along with a cordon of infantry and numerous gendarmes – nor was there

the crowd was no shortage of undercover police officers dressed in civilian clothes, nor of disgruntled individuals and conspirators.

Dense crowds of onlookers had gathered in front of the theatre exit and were held back by the line of Uhlans and gendarmes, so that there remained a clear path for the carriages to pass.

Behind and beside a non-commissioned officer's horse, a group of men had gathered who, together
[98]
appeared to belong together; at any rate, they were engaged in an animated conversation, mostly conducted in whispers or in hushed tones. A man in grubby, threadbare clothes revealed, beneath an old grey felt hat, a sharply chiselled face framed by a short red goatee. He had coarse, ugly features that seemed deeply furrowed by every passion. His eyes were restless and had a treacherous, menacing quality. He was speaking to the two students who had left the meeting of the Black Brotherhood an hour earlier, before the police stormed in. Standing before them was a Jewish couple; the man must have been one of the many commission agents at one of the local hotels, for he listed with great eloquence to his wife and those standing nearby the names of many prominent figures who were leaving the theatre, adding his own explanations.

Behind the students and their shabby-looking companion stood the old exile and an officer in a Russian uniform.

Right next to them, another group had gathered for the same purpose of watching: three people whose courtly attire showed that they had just attended the performance. They spoke German amongst themselves, and the spokesman—a sedate and good-natured-looking gentleman in his mid-forties with greying hair and the ruddy, open face of a bon vivant, which revealed the broad lower lip typical of the Habsburgs alongside a certain liveliness—seemed at least as well-versed in foreign court circles as the
[99]
Jew was in the local ones. He wore a densely packed row of medals on the left lapel of his tailcoat – his two companions, too, had several decorations.

'What a pity,' said the affable gentleman, 'I would have loved to have been present at the hunt on the Bialowicz Heath, had it not been for the parforce hunt. Just think: on the 18th, seventeen aurochs and two elk; the very next day, another three of your primeval beasts, the sort we no longer see in the German forests!'

'Truly, little Court Councillor, one is always discovering new aspects of you to admire! I never knew you were also a Nimrod when it came to aurochs and fallow deer, although I recall hearing that in your youth you were indeed a formidable hunter of other game!'

'Discretion! That was in '48, before my diplomatic career,' said the man in question with a laugh. 'I hope your strength is still holding up well, dear Pahlen? I'm only interested in the aurochs because of an article for the Kreuzzeitung. Look, Rechberg is just getting into the carriage. Isn't that Count Thun, your envoy in St Petersburg, Baron?'

'Yes – he came to meet us with Colonel Dopfler. But I rather think the report on the theatre affair might serve as a substitute for the article on the aurochs for your readers. I've

actually only heard rumours about it, as I had urgent chancellery business to attend to that very evening. What really happened?"

"The devil take it, I'll be on my guard! For that I'd
have to [100]
be as naive as Bork's new amanuensis over there with the jet-black moustache! Otherwise Pahlen will report me to Paniutin, and he'll send me to Siberia!"

"Since the military governor has just got into the carriage with your Prime Minister," said the Russian with a smile, – "and since there is no doubt about the *entente cordiale* between the St Petersburg and Vienna cabinets, despite today's backroom manoeuvring in the palace courtyard, and since you, moreover, are grappling with Kraków and Galicia just as we are with Poland, I shall tell you of that infamous but cleverly devised prank!"

"Please, my dear colleague!"

"You are probably familiar with our theatre custom, whereby the audience in the upper galleries is admitted first, and only then the stalls. The theatre had barely opened when, from the stream of people filling the gallery, a bottle was hurled into the stalls with such force that it shattered into pieces."

"A new infernal machine?"

"Indeed! For at that very moment a hellish stench spread, which no one could bear. The bottle had been filled with *assa foetida*. You can imagine the commotion that ensued. It was downright impossible to enter the stalls or the boxes, and yet one could expect the arrival of Their Highnesses at any moment. Anischkoff was in despair and had an entire perfumery shop ransacked and bucketfuls of *eau de cologne* poured out, but to no avail!"

"Rose oil from Adrianople!" remarked the Court
Councillor. [101]

'You Russian gentlemen have, after all, almost always had your sights set on the Sublime Porte; why do you forget its finest product, next to the odalisques?'

'Precisely because the whole affair was so ridiculous, it was all the more exasperating. In the end, the Emperor had to be signalled to keep his guests waiting for a while. Everyone was chased out of the theatre and every door and window in the entire building was thrown open to drive out the devilish stench with a draught. Only in this way was it possible, after half an hour, to finally make the theatre passable again and cover up the whole affair from the guests, who do not have as keen a sense of smell as our friend here. But let us walk along the grand avenue. I have reserved the little kiosk by the water for us for supper, and there, through the blinds, we can watch everything go by without being seen ourselves!"

'*Excellent!*' said the Court Councillor. 'And would you like a suggestion, my dear Privy Councillor?'

"What mischief are you up to now?"

"You've guessed right! – The three of us, appendages of high diplomacy, shall form a new holy alliance by introducing our three foreign ministers – Russia, Austria, Prussia, that is, Gortschakoff, Rechberg –"

"But Schleinitz is missing!"

"Never mind, we'll replace him with Grüner! Ever since he roused himself to make that statement against the *Regent,* I've really been seeing him in armour rather than a corset, and I hope

will also prove disloyal to the virtuous bachelors' society on Behrenstraße!"
[102]

'Woe betide anyone who falls victim to your malicious tongue. Keep your political views to yourself until we're out of this crowd. 'Can't you keep an eye on things, you oaf, or shall I call the guard?' The threat, accompanied by a hefty shove, was directed at a ragged, ugly lad who was pushing his way through the middle of the group in great haste to reach the man in the felt hat and the two students.

Whilst the three diplomats continued on their way, the boy tugged at the red-bearded man's coat; he was gazing with a dark, hateful look at the distinguished gentlemen and ladies who were still streaming out of the theatre entrance and climbing into their carriages.

'Pan *Chmelenski!*' whispered the boy.

The red-bearded man looked around in alarm. "Hush, you scoundrel, or . . ."

'It's Janko, the Gallows-Rope,' whispered Lobrowski.

The Red-Bearded Man had already turned back towards the theatre, so as not to arouse suspicion. "Ask him what he wants," he said quietly, but he himself asked the Jew standing before him: "Do you know those foreign officers coming over there, Factor?"

"How could I not know such distinguished gentlemen?" boasted the Jew. 'Can't you see, Blümchen, all those high-ranking dignitaries gathered together, who have come to pay their respects in Warsaw to our most gracious Lord and Emperor, who is a father to his people, the Poles and the Russians! – Ouch! Watch out, you're stepping on my corns.
[103]
Have you already seen His Majesty the Emperor of Austria, who last year waged a great war in Italy, which is far from here, and the second King of Prussia, since the first is still ill? The Regent is a most stately gentleman and, what's more, not at all proud, for yesterday he thanked me kindly when I doffed my hat to him in the street! Those two over there—the one with the handsome sideburns and the friendly face, and the tall one with the aquiline nose in the dragoon uniform of the Little Russia Regiment—are, after all, the brothers of the King of Prussia and the uncles of our monarch, whom the God of Abraham may preserve for the blessing of our nation. – They're approaching me again, young sir! – That gentleman over there in the Ingria Hussar uniform is the Grand Duke of Weimar – I don't know where that's situated – but a Grand Duchess has married into that house, and the other is a Prince of Hesse-Kassel, who may well become King of Denmark, if the high potentates so permit. – Do you see General Jesimowitsch? I showed him to you yesterday at the Hôtel d'Angleterre, when you were standing there peering curiously through the door. The gentleman walking beside him is the Grand Duke of Mecklenburg, who ascended the throne only six weeks ago – as the valet told me – Good heavens, what luck you're having today, Blümchen, to see so many potentates all together! That there is a prince of Württemberg, who married our Emperor's sister; she'll one day become Queen of the Confederation of the Rhine, as I imagine
[104]
have been told. That prince over there, however, is a Prussian general and has shot many bears in Russia, which are now stuffed and on display in his castle. One must have

distinguished acquaintances like me to know all this! How else could I know that this morning the Prime Minister of Austria had to stand without a coat for an hour in the rain in the courtyard of Belvedere Palace before he was allowed to go home again. ‘Blümchen, I tell you, our Emperor is a mighty man! But now let’s go, so we don’t miss the illuminations!’

The chatter of the talkative commission agent had served to conceal the incident that was taking place right next to him.

The student Lobrowski had bent down towards the boy.

‘What’s happened, Janko?’

“A disaster, sir! Pan Karlowicz sent me! That devil Drosdowicz had followed the stranger’s trail – the police discovered the confectioner’s in Spital Street and raided Pan Asnik’s flat. I arrived too late to warn the distinguished gentlemen.”

The student let out a wild curse. “Have they arrested the count?”

“Which count, sir? I took to my heels and ran as fast as I could when Mr Karlowicz so graciously threw me out the door. He merely ordered me to tell you what had happened!”

The student thought for a moment. “Off we go [105]
down the avenue. Wait for me at the second side street on the right!”

The little rascal ducked down, squeezed through the legs of the Jewish commission agent—pinching him where his calf ought to have been—tore a frill from Mrs Blümchen’s silk dress and vanished into the crowd, which was now surging away from the theatre into the main corridors.

Lobrowski slipped his arm under the Red Man’s. “Let’s go, my friend! Above all, do you have today’s password for the guards?”

“No – but Garzynski must get it from the officer he’s speaking to.”

“Tell him that, Aweide,” he turned to the second student, “and meet us in the second side alley on the right. The police have raided the Blacks’ gathering at Asnik’s in Spital-Straße. The new agent from Paris has been arrested along with them!”

“Damn it all! They’ll pay for this. Who pulled this stunt?” asked the Red One.

“Who else but Drosdowicz!”

‘He’ll regret it, by my blood!’ said the red-bearded man, his eyes flashing. ‘Now we must prove to them, today very same, that we won’t be intimidated by this. Instead of the sentry, one of their spies must fall. I spotted Varkovicz, the turncoat, earlier!’

‘I saw him outside the theatre!’

“He is Anischkoff’s right-hand man. Let him face the
punishment!” [106]

They disappeared into the paths of the park.

The second student had whispered a few words to the old exile from the silver mines of Nerchinsk. The latter had merely nodded briefly and continued his conversation with the officer.

‘We have been enslaved and kept in a state of subservience for too long,’ said the latter, ‘for discontent not to have finally taken hold across all social classes. If the Poles are so foolish as to rave about their particular nationality – well, let

do so – we shall not stand in their way, as it helps us to achieve our aims!”

‘But love of one’s homeland, that sense of nationality, is surely innate in human beings!’

‘Nonsense! It is instilled through ignorance and speculation, in order to suppress any freer expression of spirit! Love of one’s country is rubbish; wherever a person is happy, that is their homeland! Legitimacy – loyalty to the sovereign? Empty phrases – drummed into people by the clergy and bureaucrats, so that their comfortable lives are not disturbed. How can a chance of birth make another human being my master? – God? Let him show himself if we are to believe in him! Virtue – honour? They are absurd barriers that only hinder the fulfilment of our natural abilities. We believe in nothing, absolutely nothing, and that is why we call ourselves the *Nihilists!*”

‘But surely a person must believe in something; surely something must be sacred to them!’ [107]

‘Certainly! That is physical well-being! Our belief is: to live well! To live freely, without any constraint! Hence a universal social republic! Our self is the true God, and whatever stands in its way must fall!’

‘That is appalling,’ said the old man with a shudder; he had, after all, retained his faith in the ideals of life during the twenty-five-year-long night of his Siberian imprisonment. ‘With such principles, nothing can be sacred to you, even in the struggle itself!’

‘Revolutions are carried out only with blood! What difference does it make whether we kill our enemies on the battlefield or on a street corner? Conversely, of the thousand soldiers who fall, nine hundred are not even our real enemies, but are merely forced to fight against us. Or are a noose and a dagger worse weapons than a bullet and a bayonet? – Go away with your ridiculous qualms – I hope that when the fighting really begins and the sole aim is the destruction of the enemy, you will act just as we do!”

Garzynski remained silent; his heart was too full to speak, for he knew that the terrible principles expounded by the young Russian were already shared by many members of the Polish propaganda movement. Yet his heart rebelled against this doctrine, which would have made even a Marat seem reactionary by comparison.

‘I have been told,’ he said, ‘that you yourself owe your education at the Cadet Corps to the Tsar’s grace?’

[108]

‘Bah! What harm is there in that? What thanks do I owe him for having brought up a soldier who, as little more than a boy, had to risk his life for him at Balaclava and Inkerman, when life truly does sometimes offer quite pleasant pleasures! Had I not been sent to the Cadet School, I might well have become a porter or a scoundrel and lived just the same. Go on – talking of gratitude is childish. It is one’s own advantage alone that matters, and the ‘I’ lies behind every so-called act of kindness!”

‘And is the League of Nihilists widespread throughout all the provinces of the great colossus?’

‘If you were one of ours, a single word at the Chinese border would secure you not so much friends—for friendship is a foolish concept—but support and comrades, just as in Odessa or Tornea. Let the time come, and you will

be amazed at the web that has been woven in secret! Free, republican Russia will spring forth as swiftly and fully as Minerva from the cleft head of the earthen Jupiter—only that a mighty hand has cleft that head!"

'Beware, you and your party, of regicide,' said the old man. 'It has never brought blessing to the cause of liberty. A worse ruler has always sprung from that blood. Let us go our separate ways, and you go yours! – A free Poland will be a true friend to Russia against the Germans.'
[109]

'Is that the answer I am to take back to those who sent me?'

'For me and my friends, yes! – I shall not deny that you are likely to find more sympathy amongst other factions of the Grand League – I stand too close to the edge of life to learn a new creed that threatens to take from me everything for which I have fought and suffered. An independent, free Poland—whether as a republic or under a strong monarch, even if that monarch were a prince of a foreign lineage—is all I long for and strive for with my last ounce of strength. I cannot even say that I wish you every success, for in and of himself your Emperor is a good and enlightened man who means well by his people, as is proven by the great work of peasant emancipation which he is undertaking. I would be sorry if a criminal hand were to rise up against him, and in any case – let it not be that of a Pole!'

The Russian officer smiled scornfully. 'You know from history that we are less to be trusted! Good night, then, for today. When the Russian noose is placed round your neck and that of your friends in the Warsaw Citadel, remember that you grew the hemp for it without cutting it down. Incidentally, if my friends and I can be of any service to you, we are at your disposal.'

'That can be done at once, sir! Has today's password been kept the same for the garden as well?'

"No! It was changed an hour ago." [110]

"And what is it?"

"Panstwo cesarskie!"[1] Well, I think it won't be called that for much longer!"

He extended his hand to the old poet, who touched it with a certain timidity, and disappeared into the crowd.

———

Not far from the pavilion where the Prince Regent of Prussia resided in Lazienki Park, Titular Councillor von Pahlen had arranged for an exquisite supper to be served in a small kiosk hidden amongst the lamps and trees, including the red Clicquot Veuve—which is served only at the imperial family's table—chilled in ice. It was here that the three diplomatic friends—or, more accurately, acquaintances—retired. They had often met whilst in the retinues of their respective potentates, and this had fostered a certain intimacy amongst them, which extended to, and perhaps most of all, the discussion and dissection of high politics and its protagonists.

[1] The Empire.

Their initial appetite was soon satisfied, and when the sole servant attending them was about to clear away the dish of Leipzig larks and the exquisite cabbage braised three times in champagne, the Court Councillor, who enjoyed a good meal, but drank very little, filled his plate once more, garnished the cabbage with a few finely chopped truffles, cast a longing glance at Larose's ruby, and thus made his views known:
[111]

'Most learned, most honoured and most commanding Prime Ministers of the three realms—those laid to rest in the Treaty of Paris, and yet, as is evident from our gathering over larks, champagne and Rothspohn, of which one of my present ambassadors dared to claim that it is the natural drink of the North Germans! – that most necessary Holy Alliance – what are your thoughts on Russia?'

'When I next come to Berlin,' said the Austrian, 'I shall go and see it at the Wallner Theatre. Did Your Excellency perhaps write the play yourself with your witty pen?'

'Don't even think of it, my dear fellow,' smacked the Court Councillor, shoving half a Lerche into his mouth. 'I no longer concern myself with the theatre, since my vigour for such things is no longer sufficient. But since you are evading the question, and I cannot possibly expect His Highness to make an open confession to our colleague, I shall take it upon myself to answer the question. Something is rotten in the state of Denmark!'

'Very rotten,' remarked the Austrian, who took the quote literally. 'The German Bundestag will have to deal with this next time, although the professors in Kiel and the old theorists of '49 are making more of a fuss than is necessary!'

'My dear Count,' replied the Titular Councillor, 'I believe that in Vienna, too, the apple has more than a few wormholes; among other things, apart from the reminiscences of Brück and Eynatten from this spring, there is the presidency in Frankfurt
[112]
. The implementation of the German Confederation is always as tedious a business as it is delicate. The cigar that the gentleman over there' – he pointed to a carriage passing along the avenue – 'lit at the Bundeshotel proves that the Prussian junkers are not exactly very patient and will not be waiting for Austria.'

The baron peered through the window with his lorgnette. 'Isn't that Count Bismarck[1], your current envoy
in St Petersburg, travelling there with Budberg?"

'Certainly,' said the Court Councillor – 'I think Prussia has much to expect from one of them, and very little from the other. The general sitting with them is Alvensleben; the Regent thinks very highly of him, and I hope he'll still break our necks!'

'Who? You?'

"You're forgetting that today I represent the Auerswald-Schwerin Ministry."

"Why isn't Auerswald here himself, actually?" asked the Viennese man.

'His finest quality is that he is just as avoidable as Herr von Beust in Dresden is unavoidable. He prefers the aesthetic gatherings at the Lessing family's to diplomatic congresses. Indeed, dear friends, our position is no longer as secure since the Chambers have shown themselves to be so ungrateful regarding the bill on army reorganisation!'

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[1] Correction of a typographical error. Page 112, line 8 from the top, should read: Herr von Bismarck – instead of: Graf Bismarck.

‘Listen, little court councillor,’ said the Austrian diplomat, warmed by champagne and confidence, ‘I really don’t know why you Prussians
[113]
can’t keep a bit of peace in Germany and keep getting back into these military affairs. Our armies are quite good, after all, and defeated the French in 1813 and 1814. If the Prussians had stood by us last year, we certainly wouldn’t have lost Lombardy and all this fuss simply wouldn’t have happened.”

‘I believe so myself,’ said the Court Councillor dryly, exchanging a glance with the Russian. ‘But you do have an excellent new Minister of War now!’

“Yes – Lieutenant Field Marshal Count Degenfeld-Schomburg was appointed before the Emperor’s departure!”

“Quite right! The very same man who introduced our training battalion to you and, immediately after the Battle of – was it Custozza or Magenta? – sent two soldiers to detention because their greatcoats, rolled up on top of their knapsacks, were wrapped two inches too wide! He must surely be the inventor of those knapsacks with the tried-and-tested drawers that, once pulled out, wouldn’t go back in again?”

‘Well, listen – you Prussians still have your fair share of old-fashioned ways. But, since we’re speaking in confidence,’ the Baron continued, ‘what was the story again about Bismarck and Thun and the cigar? We’ve never heard anything proper about it in Austria.’

“It’s my pleasure, dear Count Rechberg, to fill in the gaps in your diplomatic reports. You see, there
[114]
the Regent is just driving past. Count Adlerberg is with him, along with the Prince of Hohenzollern. Look, there’s Roon; he’s a pillar of the army’s organisation. All he needs is a different Foreign Minister to show the world what Prussia is capable of. Over there is Manteuffel – the devil only knows whether the man is more of a diplomat or a soldier. Illaire – to hell with his family connections!”

‘But what about the story of Bismarck?’

‘Quite right! Your diplomats, my dear Count, are otherwise regarded as the very picture of courtesy – yet with us Prussians, they sometimes show their true colours. Count Thun must be a passionate lover of cigars! When he was the Federal Diet envoy in Frankfurt and Bismarck was seconded to our envoy to the Confederation at the start of his diplomatic career, he naturally paid his respects to the Count and was received. But when he entered the office of the all-powerful Count, Count Thun remained calmly seated at his desk, with his back turned to him, and carried on working, smoking his cigar, for more than five minutes without taking any notice of the new attaché’s greeting or presence. Suddenly, he heard a match crackling behind him, and when he turned round in astonishment and curiosity, his visitor had made himself quite at home in an armchair, lit a cigar and was blowing smoke into his courteous host’s eyes. ‘Bismarck,’ I must tell you, ‘is an excellent marksman and never misses his target!’ The anecdote caused much laughter among the diplomatic corps!«
[115]

‘It is certainly a strong one, from both sides, and brings to mind Prince Menshikov’s paletot,’ remarked the Austrian, not without some embarrassment. The reference amused the Russian.

‘Please, dear Court Councillor, tell us a little more about your famous Markish squire.
How did he behave in ’48?”

[“]Oh – two little anecdotes will do him justice. One evening I happened to bump into him and he invited me to go with him to a beer hall to have a mug of beer. Whilst we were sitting there chatting, a bearded, loud-mouthed fellow at the next table was constantly railing against the King and had the audacity to use the most despicable language. I could see the anger rising more and more within my companion, but he did not turn red with it; instead, he grew paler and paler. Finally, as the man’s tirade was still continuing, he stood up, took his beer mug in his hand and walked over to him. ‘You’ve been ranting about His Majesty the King for a quarter of an hour now,’ he said with the utmost composure. ‘If I’ve counted to three by now and you haven’t left the premises, I’ll smash this tankard over your head!’ The man with the big beard sprang to his feet: ‘How dare you, sir? Who are you? I can say whatever I like – the people of Berlin won their freedom on the barricades on 18 March! You’re trying to tyrannise us here –” *“One!”* – “I appeal to public opinion!” shouted the barricade hero, his legs beneath
[116]
table – ‘I’m not afraid of you, ch –’ ‘*Two!*’ – The hand holding the tankard rose slowly and everyone around listened in silence to the outcome. ‘As a free German, I protest . . .’ – ‘*Three!*’ Even before the word was spoken, the man with the great beard had vanished, and Junker Bismarck, without so much as a flicker of expression, sat down beside me again and asked for a fresh mug!’

The two listeners laughed heartily at the anecdote. “We could certainly have done with people like that during the revolution in Vienna,” said the baron. “But you were going to tell us another story.”

“It’s also set in the glorious year of the barricades and under similar circumstances. I heard it from a friend who was at some gathering with Bismarck. A chap was haranguing old Wolden with his rhetoric at Potsdam station. On arriving in Potsdam, the young nobleman approached the little revolutionary, who, startled by the tall figure, recoiled right up against the wall, and asked: ‘What is your name?’ – ‘But I beg your pardon, sir . . .’ – ‘What is your name?’ repeated Bismarck, placing his index finger on the man’s chest. ‘My name is *Stängel!*’ stammered the frightened man. ‘Well then, dear Mr Stängel,’ said the tall man, raising his finger in warning, ‘take care that I do not pluck this Stängel!’ With that, he turned his back on Stängel just as calmly, and Stängel, pale as a corpse, disappeared as quickly as he could.

‘A real sense of humour,’ laughed the Russian. ‘If he gives up his diplomatic career and one day
[117]
becomes a minister in your government – who knows! – the Houses of Parliament may have a thing or two to swallow when it comes to his sense of humour. But, my dear colleagues, we are forgetting our important cabinet matters amidst all this talk of Clicquot, larks and anecdotes. The man on the Seine is playing a dubious role in the Roman question! We are, admittedly, less concerned with the case of the

Papacy, with whom we are on the verge of falling out over Poland, but Russia could not allow this blatant breach of international law to go unchallenged, and has therefore recalled its envoy from Turin!”

‘And is that all you intend to do for the unfortunate King Francis?’ asked the Viennese man. ‘Do bear in mind, Your Highness, that Sardinia took sides against you in the Crimean War and that the King of Naples was the only one who openly stood by you, whilst Prussia at least had your back!’

‘It is a sad state of affairs for the Bourbons,’ remarked the pseudo-prince, ‘but what is to be done? Your own cabinet has taught us a lesson in ingratitude, and we are now on the best of terms with the Tuileries. Our nobility simply cannot do without Paris! A new Triple Alliance between France, Prussia and Russia – whereby France receives the left bank of the Rhine, Prussia makes amends in Germany, Russia obtains the Baltic provinces as far as the Vistula, consolidates its position in Galicia and, for the time being, takes the Danube principalities . . . “

The Court Councillor laughed heartily when he saw the embarrassed expression on the Viennese diplomat’s face at this proposal, which

[118]

touched upon certain secret plans and negotiations under the guise of satire.

‘For heaven’s sake, stop there, His Highness Gortschakoff; you’re spoiling Count Rechberg’s appetite, and I’ll bet ten to one he’s already harbouring pernicious thoughts of revenge against our poor Prussia. Consider this: the Hungarian question, the Concordat, the offer of 140 million for Venetia, the Kingdom of Italy and the new imperial constitution—I don’t know which one it is now, given there have been so many over the past twelve years—are already causing him enough trouble as it is.’

‘Bah – why don’t you take the money and save yourselves from national bankruptcy?’ said the Russian. ‘In the face of the deception regarding nationalities proclaimed by His Majesty the Emperor of the French, you will lose Venetia sooner or later anyway.’

“It is just as possible that we might regain our rightful possession, Lombardy,” remarked the baron irritably. “It’s not the end of the world just yet, and as for the French alliance, I might perhaps have quite a different story to tell you, and the Prussians need not feel quite so secure. Austria is a tenacious nation and has more friends in Germany than Berlin does.”

“Damn it,” said the Court Councillor, “we’re straying from foreign policy to domestic affairs, and that’s a delicate matter. Each of us has our weaknesses, and that’s why we’d do well to stick together

[119]

to cover them up. But look, why are all those people rushing down that avenue? Something must have happened!”

“Some drunkard – let’s ask Vasili,” said the Russian indifferently, and rang the bell.

The servant appeared immediately.

“Find out, Vasilovich, what’s happening over there in the avenue that’s making people rush that way!”

The obedient servant placed his hand on his chest and winked conspiratorially.

“It’s nothing, Father, you needn’t worry. I’ve already heard about it!”

“Well?”

“Oh – they’ve just found a policeman stabbed to death in the bushes. They’ve cut off the lad’s tongue.”

The Titular Councillor bit his lip, for he knew full well that the Prussian spoke Russian perfectly and must therefore have understood the casual report. Indeed, the Prussian had risen at once, and the Viennese man had followed his example at a nod.

‘It is time for us to leave, Your Highness,’ said the Berliner, making a feeble attempt to maintain the previous tone of jest. ‘Indeed – even though it is October – the air in Warsaw is somewhat muggy and volcanic. I prefer the Berlin climate. Thank you for the excellent hospitality – and you, Baron, surely they didn’t confiscate your revolver at the border?’

[120]

‘God forbid – surely the tax officials will show some respect for an imperial special train!’

‘Who knows! – But let’s be off before the lamps go out. It’s midnight and I don’t like the dark, not even in Łazienki!’

3. High politics.

A pretty, elegantly furnished, fairly spacious study in the Belvedere was warmed by the fire in the marble fireplace.

With his back against one of the caryatids of the fireplace stood a man in a uniform overcoat. He might have been in his early forties and was of tall stature, the majesty of which was further enhanced by the serious, commanding expression on his face with its clear, large eyes.

A large dog pressed itself against his feet in a fawning manner, its head occasionally brushing the tall gentleman’s hand in a friendly gesture.

Seated at a desk in the centre, covered with papers and portfolios, was a gentleman of medium height, slender build and delicate features, busy making notes or reading out passages from the papers before him to the gentleman by the fireplace.

He wore

[121]

a full dress uniform richly adorned with gold, and over it the Grand Cords of the Orders of Alexander Nevsky, Franz Joseph and the Black Eagle.

Standing by the door in a stiff military posture was an officer in the dusty uniform of the Russian Field Jäger Corps, which was clearly worn from a long journey.

‘When did you leave Fort Pischpek[1]?’ asked the distinguished gentleman by the fireplace of the officer.

“On 17 September!”

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[1] A frontier fortress of the Khokans.

“So news from the Kyrgyz border still takes four weeks to reach us, Prince, for on the 16th we received the first telegram from the Minister of War in Grodno. This must change; the construction of the telegraph lines to the Caucasus must be speeded up, Prince. Repeat the result to me, Lieutenant!”

“Surrender on terms of mercy or otherwise after a five-day siege; 627 prisoners, 3 flags, 5 copper guns and 11 small guns made of cannon metal.”

‘What are you holding in your hand?’

“Atabek-Datchi’s axe.” He laid it at the gentleman’s feet.

‘And the Khokand thief? What has become of him?’

“I split his head open, Father, when I took the axe from him as he was fleeing.” [122]

“Stand up, *Captain*, I am pleased with you! – Put the weapon over there and go!”

The officer saluted and left the room. “Make a note of him,” said the gentleman. “Has the telegraph brought any news of my mother yet?”

“No, Sire.”

“Then continue with your report. But ensure that we receive a courier with the dispatches from Skierniwice every hour tomorrow. – First, the reports from Paris.”

‘Your Majesty’s handwritten letter, published in extract form by the Moniteur, has caused quite a sensation. People now believe an alliance between France and Russia is a certainty.’

“And what do you think, Prince Alexandrovich?”

‘I believe, Sire,’ said the minister with a subtle smile, ‘that the four horses of the Orlov breed, which Shuvalov brought to Paris with Your Majesty’s letter, were quite exceptional animals.’

There was a brief pause; the nobleman by the fireplace patted the dog on the head.

‘What is the latest news regarding the troop concentrations?’

“Despite all the denials in the official newspapers, significant concentrations of troops are taking place around Lyon, and 7,000 men have recently been embarked at Toulon for Rome and Civitavecchia.”

“So people believe war is coming?”

“Austria’s declaration of war on [123]
Italy as a consequence of the Warsaw Conference. France is very well represented in Vienna by Mr Moustier, Sire. I do not doubt for a moment that the Tuileries are aware of the programme which Count Rechberg presented this morning—or rather, sought to present, since Your Majesty did not deign to accept it.”

‘Have you so quickly forgotten Sevastopol, Prince Alexandrovich? – Repeat the specific wording of the programme.’

‘Neutrality in the event of a new conflict between Austria and Sardinia; neutrality on all sides; recognition of the principle of non-intervention, including for Austria.’ –

‘The present Emperor of the French can impossible agree to that – the die is cast, and he cannot yet abandon Sardinia.’

The minister had taken a folded sheet of paper from a briefcase and stood up. He took a step forward with deep deference.

‘Your Majesty will recall that in May of this year, Emperor Napoleon, through us, made a proposal to the Prince Regent of Prussia that he should cede the left bank of the Rhine to France and, in return, receive compensation in Germany as he saw fit, and that the reply was: “Not a foot of German soil.”’

‘That was a royal reply! – Go on – you’ve got something up your sleeve, Prince!’

‘Here is a detailed note from the secret archives in Vienna concerning the second meeting between Emperor Franz
[124]
Joseph and Emperor Napoleon at Villa-Franca. On 12 July, the Member of Parliament Kienlake had claimed in the English Parliament that in it Emperor Napoleon had offered the Emperor of Austria the return of Lombardy on condition that Austria remain passive in its operations to be undertaken on the Rhine. The news was important enough to get to the bottom of it. This transcript cost me 2,000 guilders.’

‘And its contents?’

“It confirms Kienlake’s statement. Emperor Franz Joseph is a ‘German prince’, whereas – –
_“

‘Speak!’

‘However, the new decrees of the 20th do not bode well for this trend, and I have
here in my hands the evidence that a coalition against Prussia is being quietly prepared, one which is not much different from that of 1765.”

‘Speak more clearly, Prince!’

“To put it bluntly, people fear the current Regent. The imminent passing of the unfortunate King Frederick William IV is certain. The Regent is not merely a born soldier; he is now also displaying qualities that promise Prussia a significant role, as soon as he has freed himself from the shackles that currently bind him and has found the right people. The new organisation of the army is a reality, and he is pushing it through. In Vienna, they recognise that the influence of female diplomacy has come to an end, and they fear this. I myself believe that the Regent, conscious of a great,
[125]
German mission. To that end, there are plans to curtail Prussia’s development in due course.’

‘And how?’

‘By strengthening particularism, which alone has hitherto given foreign powers—including ourselves—such great influence over Germany. They will seek every opportunity to isolate Prussia and strengthen Saxony and Hanover. Prussia has a formidable enemy in the Guelphs. Holstein is unlikely to remain under Danish rule; a new, separate principality will be established there, which will prevent Prussia from developing its maritime power. For the time being, Austria will do away with the current dualism – however limited it may be – and reclaim its imperial position in Germany; this will lead to an open rupture, from which an internal war is likely to ensue. This is the aim of Austria’s demand for unconditional non-intervention. Russia and France are to tie their own hands, naturally not without compensation. The word given at Villa-Franca is an imperial word, but

it is merely a personal one. The Vienna Cabinet thinks and acts differently, and Austrian policy has never hesitated, when it seemed necessary or advantageous, to sacrifice a province—which, given the artificial composition of this state, carries less weight than in any other. France will therefore take the left bank of the Rhine, and we shall retain Posen or Prussia.'

The nobleman by the fireplace crossed his arms and gazed into the distance for a long time.
[126]

'And what do you think and advise, Prince Alexandrovich?'

The statesman at the table rested his hand, holding the paper, on the table and seemed for a moment to be considering the most appropriate response.

'Sire – the immediate future hinges on three major currents or struggles. The first is the struggle of the revolution against the thrones; I would call it the republican struggle; the second is the struggle of nationalities for separation and independence – there is a threat of endless fragmentation; the third is social reform, the struggle of labour against capital, or rather of the dispossessed against the rich. In which of these struggles does Your Majesty wish to take sides?"

'I think that is beyond question. First and foremost in the struggle against the revolution. Our statement on the Italian question also proves this.'

'Then, Sire, Russia must foster the strong and steady development of Prussia. In the struggle against the revolution, against the republican tendencies whose wretchedness is amply evident in America and Switzerland, neither Austria nor France will be a steadfast and reliable ally in the future. France is the hotbed of revolution; Austria has fallen prey to it through its concessions to Hungary. Russia's natural allies are Prussia and North America—the former for our internal development, the latter for our external development."
[127]

'With the expansion of Prussia, we are sacrificing our maritime supremacy in the Baltic Sea.'

'It is of only secondary importance to us. Russia's power and future lie in the Black Sea, and therefore the Treaty of Paris must be set aside at the earliest opportunity. So no war with France for now. Your great father, Your Majesty, failed in his ambition to *rule* over Central and Western Europe as well; family ties will ensure the necessary influence. The will of Peter the Great has a profound significance, from which one never strays with impunity."

The noble lord pondered for a few moments. "So, in a word, what is your opinion, Prince?"

'A policy of a free hand. No obligations to Austria – or to anyone else. That will give Russia time to pursue its internal development and to await the consequences of Your Majesty's great work, the abolition of serfdom. Russia must concentrate its efforts so that it is ready when the moment comes. But as for that – –'

The statesman hesitated.

"Speak!"

"To that end, it must be a united *Russia*!"

'I understand you – it is this ceaseless pressing that has already caused me so many bitter hours!'

‘Russia must be *Russian*, not one-third German or Polish. *One* church, *one* language, *one* form of government, as well as *one* sovereign. German interests and rights in Russia must be abolished if we are to
[128]
German rights in Germany. It may be painful for Your Majesty to renounce old attachments, but – it *must be done* if you wish to make Russia truly great.”

‘I am of German descent; my mother . . .’

“Your Majesty is a Romanov, a native-born son of Russia. Her Majesty, the Empress Mother –”

A faint sound at the door interrupted his words.

The nobleman rang a bell, the signal to grant entry; the prince had stepped up to the door.

Through the half-open door appeared the adjutant on duty, a blue envelope in his hand.

‘Ah – surely news from St Petersburg! Give it to me – quickly!’

The nobleman took the dispatch from the prince’s hand, tore open the envelope himself and read the telegram.

He tossed it impatiently onto the table.

‘Still no improvement – the wording is so vague again. The Empress refers to letters that are on their way,’ he said impatiently. – ‘Let us continue. Any further reports?’

‘Chief Superintendent Anitschkoff requests an audience.’

‘Very well. Tell him to wait!’ The

aide-de-camp withdrew.

‘We were speaking of the coalition against Prussia: do tell me more, Prince!’

‘Your Majesty will recall that the King of Hanover, on his return journey from Baden-Baden to the
[129]
meeting with Emperor Louis Napoleon, he paid a visit to the Elector of Hesse. The Confederation’s opposition to Prussian demands on the Hessian constitutional issue, and the proposals of the Würzburg Military Commission, are the first moves by the smaller states, which Austria has been quietly preparing. The appointment of Prince Metternich, a notorious enemy of Prussia, as envoy to Paris is a further sign.”

A faint smile flitted across the gentleman’s serious face. ‘You forget, Alexandrovich, that Prussia’s current representative in St Petersburg is by no means a great friend of Austria either. So that balances things out.’

‘Prussia’s most zealous opponent sits at the heart of Germany: Minister von Beust in Dresden. Mr von Seebach’s reports on this matter are reliable. Mr von Beust is the driving force behind the Coalition.’

The nobleman’s brow furrowed sternly. ‘Paniutin claims that Polish propaganda has established one of its strongholds in Dresden.’

“Our intelligence from Paris points in that direction. Further details are not yet known. I must not conceal from Your Majesty that in St Petersburg itself, and particularly in Moscow, numerous signs of secret intrigues have been observed which appear to be linked to Polish agitation. Sooner or later, we must be prepared for an uprising in Poland and Lithuania.”

“Well, by God! You shall find me ready. – I shall make one more attempt with Wielopolski, –
[130]
but if that fails, the time for leniency is over! To cut a long story short, Prince Alexandrovich, for I still wish to speak to Anitschkoff and feel under attack – what reply will you give to Count Rechberg?”

‘With Your Majesty’s permission, an evasive one. The recall of our envoy from Turin demonstrates how Your Majesty views the events in Italy from the standpoint of international law and legitimacy. Further interference is not in our interest. As regards a declaration of war by Austria against Italy – for which the massed troops on the Po near Ostiglia and Borgeforte stand ready, and General Benedek departed from Pesth yesterday – we reserve the right to act as we see fit.”

‘Very well, so be it! And Prussia?’

“A mere hint regarding the Coalition will suffice to ensure it gives the same reply.”

“But only after returning from Skierniwice. Good night, then, Alexandrovich. May you sleep with fewer worries than I!”

He held out his hand, to which the Prince bowed respectfully. Then the Prince left the room.

The nobleman remained standing for a few moments, deep in thought. Then he sat down in the seat the minister had vacated, opened a locked drawer in the desk and took out some papers, which he skimmed through.

A look of deep displeasure and profound sorrow flitted across his noble, majestic face as he set one of the papers aside.
[131]

‘Good God,’ he murmured, deeply moved, ‘how is this to end! – The whole night here too – seventeen years! He cannot bear it! I must change his surroundings once more – or – could it really be that it is not the recklessness of youth, but a secret plan lying at the root of this, against which even my concern and power are fighting in vain!?’ – It would be diabolical! – And yet – the example of the unfortunate Duke of Reichsstadt . . . and Alexander is already a staunch supporter of the Old Russian party . . . “

He pressed the bell’s lever.

The adjutant on duty appeared at the door immediately.

“The Chief Constable!”

The officer beckoned backwards; Major-General Anitschkoff entered.

The door closed behind him; the senior official bowed almost to the ground before his master, who regarded him with a stern gaze.

‘I am dissatisfied with you, Paul Anitschkoff. – I ordered you to identify the culprits who caused the disturbance at the theatre on Monday – and have waited in vain for your report. Do you have the names?’

‘Sire – it has been impossible so far,’ stammered the bewildered man. ‘The entire Warsaw police force has been on its feet for three days searching for them, and yet the secret has been strictly kept.’

“I shall have to appoint a successor to you, Paul [132]
Anitschkoff,’ said the lord. ‘I have heard many distressing things from Warsaw, and yet I would like to be a gracious and just lord to this city and to all of Poland.’

‘It is external seduction, sir, that constantly stirs up the people’s spirits. I have new evidence.’

‘I believe it – for it is my will to do good for the country; – but they must adapt to the circumstances. I have built railways and roads and strengthened industry. Serfdom was abolished in Poland earlier than in the rest of my empire. I myself have been extremely lenient towards your clergy, yet I am poorly repaid for it. Judging by everything I have observed here myself during the few days of my stay, I must fear that you are concealing much from me regarding the true state of the country, and that many improprieties have also occurred. Otherwise, this hatred would be inexplicable to me, since we are, after all, of the same stock; and, for example, in my uncle’s Polish province, the government is not unpopular, and the monarch is even universally loved, even though there are enough fanatics there who are agitating for the restoration of Poland. Nevertheless, I have resolved to make one further attempt at conciliation, intended to demonstrate my willingness to preserve the Polish nation. I hope that the man I have chosen for this purpose, who appears to enjoy the trust of the Polish nobility and people, will fulfil his task
[133]
. Gortschakoff also advises this course. Before I make up my mind, however, I must have the full truth about the mood and events in the country, and I demand this from you and Paniutin. What do you think of the Marquis Wielopolski?’

The Chief Superintendent of Police was no great friend of the Margrave or of the national-liberal movement – if one may use that term here – which he represented.

‘Your Majesty,’ he said, ‘the Marquis is an excellent man and a man of honour. He loves the land of his forefathers, but I also believe that he is sincerely devoted to Your Majesty. Only
. . . “

‘Speak!’

“It’s just that I do not believe him to be vigorous enough to keep the revolutionary faction in check. Even with the best of intentions, he could do a great deal of harm, which would then have to be rebuilt with blood and iron.”

The words seemed to trouble the nobleman. ‘I shall give the matter further thought,’ he said after a pause, ‘although there is much to be said in favour of the endeavour and the man himself. In any case, he is an uncompromising opponent of the fanatics and of that ambitious fool Miroslawski. Yet you have not come here today without reason, Major-General. Do you have a report?’

“Yes, Your Majesty. The police have made a very important arrest this evening.”

“Then report.”

‘Police Commissioner Drosdowicz, one of my most diligent and observant officers, encountered this
[134]
evening, whilst in disguise at the Bernardine Monastery, two individuals who aroused his suspicion. He had them kept under surveillance whilst he himself pursued the trail of those distributing the seditious and scandalous leaflets with which Warsaw has been secretly inundated for the past four days, and which call for demonstrations to coincide with the presence of Your Majesty and the foreign monarchs. It was established in the course of this that the petty street hawkers were distributing the scandalous leaflets; however, it has not yet been possible to catch any of the criminals in the act.’

The distinguished gentleman shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

‘Drosdowicz’s agent followed the strangers’ trail to a confectioner’s on Spital Street. Drosdowicz carried out a search of the premises, during which evidence was found that a gathering of suspects – presumably all members of a secret revolutionary society – had taken place in the flat of a medical student, Adam Prot Asnik. However, the as yet unidentified individuals had escaped, and only the occupant of the flat could be arrested, along with a woman who worked as a waitress in the café – though apparently under a false name – and who had warned the fugitives.”

‘Were any documents found?’

“The student Prot Asnik had time to remove most of them. But a number of leaflets were seized.”

“And you’re bothering me over this trifle?”

‘One of the fugitives—probably the same one whom
[135]
Drosdowicz was chasing through the streets, did not have time to take the travel bag he’d brought with him. The contents of this bag are of great importance. Whilst they reveal nothing about the owner’s name, they do provide indisputable evidence that he is an envoy of the revolutionary Polish Central Committee in Paris and is supposed to negotiate with the local fanatics. The bag also contains five thousand roubles in imperial coins. The most important thing, however, is –”

The Chief Constable pulled a folio notebook of about ten to twelve sheets from his briefcase.

‘Well?’

‘It is the secret register of the members of the Polish Central Committee in Paris and of all those émigrés in America, Belgium, Denmark, France, Switzerland, Bavaria, England, Turkey, Romania, Italy and Sweden who have recognised the revolutionary Central Committee in Paris as their governing authority, both by oath and in writing, and are thus involved in the conspiracy against the lawful government!”

‘Indeed! That will save Kisseleff a great deal of money in Paris!’ said the distinguished gentleman with a smile.

“Unfortunately, with a few exceptions, the list that has been found is limited to the persons named. Section III—the members of the Propaganda in Prussia, Russia and Austria, which apparently belonged to the booklet—was not included.”

The distinguished gentleman nodded, as if a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. [136]

“Thank God and the saints!” he said. “That will spare us many arrests. These misguided people will come to their senses!”

The Chief Superintendent did not dare to contradict him, although his disagreement was quite clearly written on his face.

‘Does Your Majesty wish to see the list?’

“No – confine yourself to giving me the figures and the names of the Central Committee.”

‘It consists of 43 people, elected by all members of the Propaganda organisation. The names are: Valerian Wróblewski, elected with 1,011 votes; Kasimierz Zulinski, elected with 962 votes; apparently, these are the ones in whom the greatest trust is placed. Furthermore, Alexander Biernawski, Stanislaw Jarmund, Boleslaw Swietorzecki, Victor Heltman, Vincenz Mazurkiewicz, Edmund Korabkwicz, Jan Dzialynski, Siegmund Mitkowski, Edmund Rózycki, Karl Ruprecht, Eduard Siwinski, Sylvester Staniewicz, Anton Skolnicki, Joseph Janowski, Anton Zabicki, Titus Zienkowicz, Valerian Tomczynski, Ludwig Wolowski, Alexander Guttry, Joseph Janowski, Edmund Chojecki, Vincenz Kaminski, Franz Dobrowolski, Hieronimus Ruszczewski, Nepomuk Janowski, Alexandrowicz, Agathon Giller, Mikotai Akielewicz, Leonard Chodzko, Severin Elzanowski, *Ludwig Mieroslawski . . .* ‘

“How many votes does this one have?”

“Only twenty-one!”

[137]

The nobleman smiled. “The usual fate of the people’s tribunes! – Go on!”

“Heidenreich Kruk, Alex Krukowiecki, Heinrich Bogucki, Bohdan Zaleski, Adolph Pienkowski, Zbyszewski (sailor), Jankowski, Anton Jezioranski, Wladimir Mickiewicz, Alexander Morawski – the last one with just ten votes.”

‘The numbers!’

‘The number of conspirators is 1,475. Of these, 4 are currently in America, 25 in Belgium, 1 in Denmark, 934 in France – 469 of them in Paris alone – 108 in Switzerland, 91 in Bavaria, namely Munich, 89 in England, 90 in Turkey, 49 in Romania, 74 in Italy, and 10 in Sweden.”

‘That is good, Paul Anitschkoff,’ said the gentleman in a deep voice. ‘You have done your duty in speaking – I have done mine in listening. But it is my right *to forget!* The arrest you have made will make them wary and, hopefully, drive the seducers out of Warsaw! – The five thousand roubles are to be given to the poor of Warsaw, so that they may pray for my mother’s recovery. – Go with God, Paulovich, I am your gracious Emperor!”

The Chief Superintendent took his leave.

The ruler of 75 million people and four hundred thousand square miles was alone. He rested his hand on the table and gazed into the distance.

The dog rubbed against his foot and looked up at him. [138]

The mighty, powerful man placed his hand on the animal’s head.

‘Yes, you are grateful, loyal and obedient! Why are people not like you!’

There was a knock at the door; it was then opened without waiting for permission.

Standing on the threshold was the Chief Constable, looking very pale; he was holding an object in his hand—a small parcel—which he had covered with his handkerchief. The adjutant on duty stood behind him, clearly just as agitated.

‘What is this? Why are you entering unannounced?’

“Sire – a tragedy!”

“What has happened? What does this mean?”

The Chief Constable did not reply – he silently handed his master a half-crumpled piece of paper.

‘What’s this?’ – The gentleman stepped over to the gas lamp and read the note, written in pencil.

“Revenge for the raid on Spitalstraße. She won’t betray any more Poles!
The black avengers.”

The menacing, majestic gaze fixed on the officer.

‘A cowardly murder, Sire! A police officer, a native Pole, has been stabbed to death in a secluded part of the park and his tongue has been cut out. The murderer had the audacity to leave the shameful evidence of his deed at the entrance to the Belvedere in this parcel addressed to me.’

A dark flush of righteous anger swept across the ruler’s face
[139]
of the sovereign; his large, majestic eye blazed with stern command.

“Colonel Baratinski!”

“Sire!”

“Double the guards at all entrances to the park – no one . . . “

With heavy, clattering footsteps, he made his way through the outer antechamber, where officers and servants hurriedly made way – a man in a military overcoat appeared in the doorway of the drawing room, his brown face bearing the signs of severe exhaustion, his head covered with a field cap.

‘Where is the adjutant on duty?’ asked the newcomer hoarsely, ‘I must speak to His Majesty at once.’

“I am here myself – By the Mother of God of Kazan – it is *Galitzin!* You have come from St Petersburg? – You bring dispatches from the Empress – my mother –”

‘Sire,’ said the prince, ‘I wish I could bring Your Majesty better news! This letter gives a full account.’

The Emperor snatched it from the messenger’s hand and hurried into his study, closing the door behind him.

‘What news do you bring, Prince?’ asked the aide-de-camp anxiously.

‘The Empress’s condition is hopeless – the doctors have given her up!’

‘So she is to follow him so soon! – It will be a terrible blow to His Majesty; he loves her dearly.’ – [140]

A long, heavy silence, during which only the whispering of those present could be heard, was broken by the arrival of Prince Gortschakoff and other dignitaries, who had rushed over upon hearing the news that was spreading rapidly.

No one, however, dared to approach the door of the private chamber.

It was not until half an hour later that the bell rang, summoning the aide-de-camp. As the door was opened, one could see the sovereign, who ruled over so many millions
lives, and yet had not the power to preserve a single one against the will of Providence, sitting at the table with his head bowed.

After five minutes, the colonel returned and turned to the prince.

'The hunts at Skierniwice are cancelled. We shall return to St Petersburg at midday tomorrow. The Emperor wishes to speak to you, Prince! I must go to the Regent at once.'

The minister hurriedly obeyed the order.

At the Jewish cemetery in Prague.

It is a curious tangle of crooked, winding and narrow alleys that, near the Old Town Ring of Prague—which has witnessed so many bloody and significant episodes in Bohemian and German history—forms what is known as the Jewish Quarter of Prague.

These filthy, narrow alleys, most of which have no names and whose labyrinth is known in detail only to the inhabitants themselves, lead not to doors and hallways, but to gloomy caverns never illuminated by daylight – black abysses spewing forth a race of haggling, bickering, clamouring men, women and children, who live, huddle together and die in the squalid, filthy rooms, and who fill the narrow alleys with the strangest of wares during the day, when they are not roaming the Christian quarter to ply their trade and usury. Prague is the only city in Germany where the Jewish community, in terms of customs and dwelling, remains entirely separate from the
[142]
nation, whose name it has adopted as a collective identity in order to enjoy the benefits of civil society, or rather to make that civil society serve its own interests.

What the Tändelmarkt in Vienna and the Temple in Paris are, the Jewish Quarter in Prague is as well. Amidst this jumble of ribbons, rags, iron and leather goods, business worth many thousands is conducted every day!

Once one has made one's way through this stinking, filthy and eerie market, one suddenly comes upon an old, tall, weather-beaten wall enclosing a square measuring about 1 to 2 Morgen. Elder bushes and other wild shrubs tower over this wall, which is surrounded on all sides by the old houses of the Jewish Quarter, which seem at any moment in danger of collapsing upon it. From the outside, this strange ring of walls has an eerie, tangled, weather-beaten appearance.

It is the resting place of the dead – the famous Jewish cemetery of Prague!

Not the melancholic tranquillity beneath the old elms and firs of Christian cemeteries – not the gentle shade that lies over the cypress groves of Turkish cemeteries and tends to make them a gathering place for the idle, – nor the treeless and bushless wasteland of the newer Catholic cemeteries of the West, with their lawns that make everything the same and are therefore so heart-rendingly uniform! – is the character of this resting place; rather, it is a different spirit, the spirit of the people whose bones

[143]
have found a resting place here after their long, restless journey; their entire terrible history, full of suffering, struggle, resistance and indomitability, is etched into it. It is as though at any moment these graves—piled ten deep upon one another, tangled and overgrown with undergrowth—might burst open, these stones, crumbled by a millennium, were to shatter, sending the restless wanderer—with his knapsack on his back, his staff in his hand—out once more amongst the living generations, to deceive and enslave them and to seek the new Canaan: – *dominion!*

The Jewish cemetery in Prague is the oldest known to exist; for a hundred years the state has kept it closed by law – for the present day, for strangers, it is one of Prague's historical curiosities – for devout Jews, a sanctuary.

A gatekeeper with a chatty tongue and red eyes, who lives on the outside of the wall, opens the gate – which is otherwise always locked – to the curious stranger and leads him into this wasteland of death, which only heightens the impression made by the surrounding area. Only a narrow path remains between the densely packed rows of graves and moss-covered gravestones; thorn bushes and broom cover everything – even the grass that has sprouted in between seems to have emerged from the earth already withered.

As one walks on, the guardian of the dead recounts the history of death – of Rabbi Ben Manasse, the great conqueror of death, and of Rabbi Löw, the most learned rabbi of the 17th century.
[144]
– of Shimon the Righteous and the Polish princess Anna Schmieles. Then he leads the wanderer to the gravestone of Anna Kohn and shows him the mysterious number 606, which is said to prove that Israel has been burying its dead here for twelve hundred years, in the legendary time of Libussa and her maids on the Wisherad, long before the cross pursued even those scattered to the four winds by the wrath of Jehovah.

Even without giving credence to that date, one can nevertheless agree with the view held by the entire Jewish community that this was the site of one of the oldest – the Jews say: the *oldest* – Israelite settlements and communities in Europe. –

In silence, however, the Jewish guide walks past a spot with the curious stranger, where, beneath an ancient lilac tree amidst the crumbling stones, a strange pile of field stones rises up; and when the traveller asks him about it, he gives an evasive answer.

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Beth-Chajim – *the House of Life!* – is the name of the cemetery! – Yes, indeed, this resting place of the dead is the House of Life! For it is from here that the mysterious, mighty impulse emanates, which makes the exiles the masters of the earth, the despised the tyrants of the nations, and which is to fulfil for the children of the Golden Calf the promises once given to the people of God in the burning bush!

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[145]
Even the gloomy appearance of the Jewish quarter had taken on a certain festive air; the trinkets had vanished from the cornerstones and doorposts; the old

toothless women, the lads with their pointed, sharp faces and cunningly sparkling eyes, the girls with the voluptuous fullness of bosom and hips that so greatly facilitates the proliferation of the people, darted from cave to cave in festive garb, – leafy twigs were pinned to the houses and the broken window panes – men sat on the ancient stone bench engaged in animated conversation, whilst the younger folk chatted in the passageways. Amidst them, men and women walked to the synagogue in their finest Sabbath attire, prayer books in hand, whilst poor Christian women, compelled by poverty to serve, came with bowls and bottles to make preparations for the meal.

It was the Feast of Tabernacles, the final day, the Day of Assembly, and the darkness of evening had already fallen over the narrow alleys, whilst outside the Christian town was still ablaze in the bright rays of the setting sun.

Two men, one older, in a black silk robe with the long, hanging curls at his temples characteristic of Polish Jews, the other, of middle age in modern dress, on whom – whenever he happened to pass by a rare glimmer of light – – the diamond buttons on his waistcoat and the thick gold chain across his vest would glint – strode through the narrow streets, paying no heed to the hustle and bustle around them. [146]

The younger man seemed to be the guide, and when he had led his companion to the little cottage where the cemetery gatekeeper lived, he knocked on the already shut shutters, through the cracks of which a cheerful candlelit glow heralded the festive goings-on inside, for the summer had been a good one and had brought generous tips from the visitors.

Immediately, the gatekeeper's narrow face appeared in the doorway and peered out into the evening gloom, squinting.

'Levi Aaron, is that you? Where have you been all this time? The neighbours are all gathered already, and the cake and the kosher wine are on the table.'

'It's not Aaron,' said the man knocking. 'Come out, Joël, someone wants to speak to you!'

The gatekeeper's dim eyes had adjusted to the darkness. "God Almighty," he said in astonishment, darting out of the doorway, "it's one of the elders! Most honourable sir, what may I do for you?"

"I have no request, but the rabbi here wishes, as he is leaving by train first thing tomorrow morning, to say a short prayer in the churchyard."

'In the churchyard? Tonight? You know full well yourself, esteemed Mr Banker, that I am forbidden to open after sunset, and besides, today is the holy Sabbath.'

'For the time being, you needn't shout my status out into the night,' said the banker irritably, 'so that every haggling Jew knows that the banker Rosenberg has been
[147]
at your place. As for permission to open, I am the elder and I grant it. I shall wait here until the prayer is over."

"Won't you do me the honour of coming under my humble roof?"

"No! Hurry up and fetch the key!"

"It's hanging here behind the door."

"All the better; then the people inside won't need to know what we've done.
Find an excuse so that the nosy crowd doesn't come after me!"

The gatekeeper disappeared inside, but soon returned with a bunch of keys and unlocked the small gate beside the entrance. He had taken a lantern with him and was about to light it.

"Never mind!" said the rabbi's deep voice. "I don't need any light. Lock the door from the inside!"

"But Mr von Rosenberg . . ."

"Lock it, I tell you!"

The gatekeeper obeyed, though not without a flicker of suspicion.

'Now lead me to the grave of the holy Rabbi Simeon ben Jehuda.'

'Take hold of my robe, Reverend Sir,' said the gravedigger, 'it is dark and you might stumble over the old graves.'

'I see better at night than by day, my son!' replied the deep voice of the Polish scholar.

"Very well, then! Here is the grave!"

The old man reverently kissed the mound of stones to
[148]
which the gatekeeper had led him. Then he wrapped the prayer straps round his forehead and bowed his head.

The guard heard him murmur a long prayer in Hebrew – but it was mixed with so many ancient words, or was in a dialect so utterly unfamiliar to him, that he understood only a few expressions, even though in earlier years he had long served as cantor in a Bohemian congregation.

It was only after a considerable time, and after the gatekeeper had repeatedly shown signs of growing impatience, that the stranger finished his prayer and then turned to the cemetery guard.

'How long have you been in this post?'

'Ten years!'

"And how long did your predecessor hold the post?"

"Thirty-five!"

'Forty-five years – you can't possibly know!' muttered the old man. 'Listen!'

"What do you wish?"

"When you took over the post from your predecessor, did you receive any instructions or orders from him?"

"Me?"

"Yes, you! For it has been so ever since the first dead person found their final resting place in this soil."

'Well – and if it is true, why are you asking about it? It is the first time this has happened to me in my office.'
[149]
'Because it only happens once every hundred years, and a man's life rarely reaches that point.'

‘I see you know about it, Rabbi,’ said the gatekeeper anxiously. ‘But if I am to obey you, you must give me the word that was passed down to me by my predecessor with a sacred oath that I had to swear on the Torah.’

The Polish rabbi leaned towards him and slowly whispered a seven-syllable word into his ear.

The gatekeeper bowed humbly. ‘You are the master, Rabbi,’ he said, ‘everything shall be done as you command.’

‘You shall send away the friends who are celebrating the festival in your house before the Christian clock—which they have erected on the tower in the market square to mock our people—strikes the eleventh hour.’

‘It shall be done, Rabbi, as you say.’

‘When the bell’s hammer strikes the first blow, you shall unlock the gate of this garden of Adonai, and when the last blow has faded away, you shall disappear into your house and shut the doors and windows and seek your bed, so that you and all your household may be like a corpse that neither hears nor sees.’

‘I shall neither see nor hear!’

‘The Angel of Death will keep your soul trapped within your body and let it wander amongst the graves until the end of time, if you do not strictly obey the command!’ threatened the old man.
‘Now come and remember that, in your office, you are a servant of the [150]
Great Synagogue of Jerusalem. I need not urge you to remain silent, even towards the man of earthly vanity who has brought me here.”

They both walked back to the gate, where the banker was still standing guard.

‘Well,’ said the banker, ‘you have had your way, Rabbi, and you may report to my business associate in Warsaw that Rosenberg and Son are always ready to do any favour for a guest recommended to them by such a good source. Shall we go home, where my wife is waiting with supper?’

‘Let us go, my son,’ said the rabbi, ‘but I must excuse myself from all this vain pomp. I shall spend the night in prayer!’

The banker shrugged and handed the gatekeeper a coin. ‘Joël,’ he said quietly, ‘there is no need for the other elders of the congregation to learn of this breach of the rules.’

The gatekeeper nodded and the two of them disappeared once more into the dark alleys, which had gradually grown emptier, whilst lively chatter and the sounds of a festive meal rang out from the houses.

However wretched, filthy and dark these dens might have appeared from the outside, quite a few of the rooms situated in the innermost chambers now shone in the light of numerous wax candles, which was reflected in tall mirrors and on the precious Brussels carpets covering the floor, or glinted off the rich silverware that weighed heavily in jugs, bowls and goblets, weighing heavily on the tables at which
[151]
women and girls were seated—who during the day might have been selling trinkets down in the stinking alleyway and were now, decked out in golden chains and bracelets, rustling in heavy

silk gowns, whilst the fire of diamonds and rubies blazed from their dark hair and high-arched bosoms.

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Who does not know the magnificent Prague Bridge, which leads from the Old Town across to Hradčany, or has not at least heard of it?

Spanning sixteen double arches, the bridge stretches more than 150 feet across the Vltava, which rushes below, connecting the Old Town with the Lesser Town and Hradčany.

Emperor Charles IV, to whom the ancient Bohemian city owes its splendour, laid the foundation stone on 9 July 1358, yet it was not until 150 years later, under Wratislaw II, that it was fully completed.

What vicissitudes, what splendour, what rivers of blood has this mighty structure witnessed, having defied the passage of time, storms, waves and bullets for 500 years almost unscathed.

From those arches, the wicked Wenceslas had Saint Nepomuk thrown into the river because he refused to betray the minor sins of the Bohemian queen; along the stone-paved lane, the wild king raged with his henchmen and thugs – there Hus marched to Hradčany with his students – the vain Sigismund in merry
[152]
splendour, who was to so shamefully break his imperial word at Kostnitz's pyre! – The wild Ziska swung his mace, – George of Poděbrady marched across the mighty arches to his coronation, Louis the Jagiellon to his death at the Battle of Mohács! – Maximilian II, the last knight, gazed proudly upon his beautiful Prague, whilst the all-too-weak Rudolf, the emperor of women, jugglers and astrologers, hurled his curse down from Hradčany upon the ungrateful city that had given his brother Matthias Corvinus the stolen crown. From those windows, on 23 May 1618, the already age-greyed stone blocks witnessed the Bohemian Estates cast out the imperial councillors Martinitz and Slawata, thereby sparking the bloody religious war with which Austria laid waste to Germany for thirty years! How often did the steed of the proud man from Friedland stride across these arches; how, for weeks on end, did Swedish cannonballs thunder in vain across them towards the bridge tower of the Old Town, which was defended by the students and citizens, and on whose corner towers, for ten years, the heads of the loyalists were displayed—those who, on the scaffold of the Great Ring, paid with their lives for their courage of faith and their loyalty to the Winter King and for the defeat at the White Mountain (8 November 1620).

And once more an imperial procession led by *Albert* of Bavaria crossed the bridge; he – driven to Prague by the
enemy of the German lands, the Frenchman, had been led to Prague during the War of Succession – had himself crowned there as Charles
VII. was crowned there. Then the Prussians arrived for the first time (1744) and thirteen [153]
years later, the cannons of the Great Frederick fired 90,000 cannonballs at the city. –

But even in more recent times the bridge has been drenched in blood, during the week of Pentecost in the year forty-eight, when the wild uprising erected its barricades at the bridge tower of the Old Town, and Prince Windischgräh's cannons thundered across towards the Old Town, avenging the death of the Princess!

Few bridges can boast such a history!

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The stream of people that constantly brings this spot – as interesting as it is beautiful – in the Bohemian countryside to life also filled the wide granite pavements and the recesses of the arches with their benches and stone sculptures that very evening – undulating to and fro, an endless, colourful, shimmering procession of citizens, soldiers, strangers, country folk, clergy and labourers, who moved from one side of the river to the other, or strolled to the magnificent garden on Vltava Island to relax on that lovely evening.

The bells in the city's towers struck ten o'clock; in the semicircular pavilion where the statue of Saint Nepomuk stands, at the very spot from which King Wenceslas, – probably because Offenbach had not yet written his famous couplet about the beautiful Helena for her husbands – had the secretive confessor cast into the waters of the Vltava, thus turning a very obstinate priest into a Christian martyr – a man sat on the stone bench

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of tall, slender build, whose serious, pale countenance and receding hairline—the result of many sleepless nights spent at his study desk—clearly made him appear older than he actually was. His large, light-blue eyes, with their somewhat fixed gaze, watched the passing crowd intently, as if searching amongst the hundreds for a specific figure and still unable to find it.

The face of the man waiting did indeed display the Germanic type with its physical strength, but this strength was, as it were, spiritualised by great intellectual capacity and the exertion of the will. The qualities of the mind and the habits of life certainly exert a great influence on one's outward appearance; and even if they cannot transform its original type, they do leave their mark upon it.

Any physiognomist who had seen the man waiting on Prague's Vltava Bridge would have recognised at once that this man led a highly intellectual life and had devoted the vigour of his youth to serious and demanding studies.

The bells had just struck the tenth hour when, coming from Hradčany, a man wrapped in a light summer coat stepped into the semi-circular hall and walked towards the man waiting there, who rose quickly.

'Welcome, sir. I see you have received my letter, and curiosity—or the thirst for knowledge—has indeed been so great as to prompt you to make the journey.'

He held out his hand to him, which the other man grasped warmly with both of his own and shook.

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"Signor *Lasali*, how delighted I am to see you again, healthy and strong!"

'Good heavens! After that adventure in the Roman catacombs, where you saved my life! You see, those five days of hunger and thirst have left no after-effects, save that my appetite for ortolans and champagne has, if anything, become all the more refined. But you can also see, dear Doctor, that Larochefoucauld's and Machiavelli's maxims on human gratitude are not always entirely reliable, and that there are indeed, even in the latter half of the twentieth century, people who remember their debt of gratitude and honour their promises without being compelled to do so by the Commercial Court."

‘Believe me, Signor,’ said the scholar, ‘it was not so much the prospect of the fulfilment of your promise—and thus the fulfilment of one of my most ardent wishes—as the very fact of hearing from you again after three years that delighted me and prompted me to respond immediately to your brief letter and make the journey from Berlin here to Prague.’

“I have come here directly from Milan for this very purpose. My letter was, admittedly, very brief. Do you have it with you?”

‘Yes; I know those lines by heart, I’ve read them so often. They go: “My saviour! I once vowed to you that I would procure for you the *true* key to the Kabbalah should I find the opportunity; though I do not usually place much stock in solemn oaths, I am
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prepared to keep this one, if you wish to meet me on 8 October at 10 o’clock in the evening beneath the statue of Nepomuk on the Old Moldau Bridge in Prague. Your name is written beneath it.”

‘That’s right, that’s how it was. Do you still stand by your request?’

“More than ever! You will be doing science an inestimable service!”

“To science?” said the stranger mockingly. “That certainly wouldn’t prompt me to do this if it weren’t for my own curiosity. Listen, Doctor, lean over the parapet a little, for what we have to discuss must not be heard by the waves of the Vltava, unless we both wish to expose ourselves to certain death.”

The young scholar looked at his companion with some surprise, but complied with his request. It is time we said something about this man’s character.

He might have been of the same age as the young scholar, although the peculiar complexion of his face made any estimation difficult. The colour of his skin resembled the dull hue of a wax candle; not a trace of colour or healthy flush lay upon his face. Even his upturned lips, which bore witness to a life of indulgence, seemed bloodless and, when parted, revealed a row of large, strong teeth resembling a wolf’s. His chin and nose were strongly defined; the latter was narrow and boldly protruding, and, due to its peculiar curvature
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betraying his Jewish origins; his forehead was high and broad; indeed, the entire upper part of his head was strong and full, as evidenced by the thick, light-brown, frizzy hair, which resembled a Negro’s. Around his mouth and the broad wings of his nose lay a haughty smile, which often took on an expression of scorn and cruelty; his eyes, which were more round than oval, green-grey and very light in colour, had something vulture-like about them.

‘Listen to me, Doctor *Faust*,’ he said, as they both leaned over the balustrade and looked down at the river, upon which the glow of the narrow crescent moon shimmered. ‘When I promised you three years ago in Rome that I would introduce you to the secrets of the Kabbalah, it was more out of a desire to boast of a power and ability that I did not in fact possess at the time; for although I had not, out of a thirst for knowledge, but out of curiosity and a passing whim, I had undertaken numerous studies into the secret traditions and sciences of my people from times of old, I knew full well that I had barely set foot in the forecourt of those mysteries, which I still regard as nothing more than the sophisms and speculations of exalted minds, whose aura is used to keep fools in check

and obedience. A few chance discoveries I have made since then have led me to reconsider and have aroused my curiosity. You know, despite the short time we have spent together, that I am not the sort of man to give up so easily a thought once formed, or a clue I have found. Whatever my purpose at
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satisfying my curiosity, and whatever the true reason that prompted me to choose you as my confidant – do not concern yourself with it. Suffice it to say that the opportunity to fulfil our mutual desire is at hand, and the only question is whether you are willing to meet the conditions I must set for your participation in the investigation?'

'If they are not contrary to honour and conscience, I will accept any of them.'

"*Good heavens!* Everyone is their own best judge of that, Signor Dottore! But you have nothing to risk in this regard, though you do in another—namely, your life. Do you feel resolute enough to brave a serious danger?"

"In the service of knowledge, anything!"

"Very well! For I must tell you, I am leading you to a place where, if we were discovered, we would both be torn to pieces rather than allowed to escape alive; indeed, where the mere suspicion that we are unauthorised privy to the secret could bring a mob down upon us, which would hunt us down and kill us sooner or later."

"You're making me all the more eager, Signor Lasali."

"That was the first thing I had to tell you. The second is – you know that I myself belong to the people scattered across the earth."

"You told me that you were born a Jew."

'That is why – even though I am subjected to all the silly ceremonies and curses prescribed by the law books
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prescribe, and have been excommunicated and banished, because I deemed it more conducive to my purposes to have a little Christian baptismal water poured over my head, – I still harbour a certain *soft spot* for my origins, and the condition I set for you is your word of honour that you must observe the strictest silence regarding everything we shall see and hear, until I myself release you from your pledge."

'On my honour!'

'It's a deal. I know you understand Chaldean?'

'I have mastered it thoroughly through my studies of the ancient scriptures.'

'You know that I, too, understand it, though not as fluently as you. We shall probably need this knowledge. – Do you recall from your research into the Kabbalah that the mystical writings allude to a gathering of the leaders or the chosen ones, a gathering that recurs from time to time?'

'Yes – the Yetzirah speaks of it in specific terms, and if I have interpreted this correctly, such a gathering takes place every hundred years.'

'That is correct. The last one was held in the year 1760, and you will recall that a great upheaval in Judaism followed shortly afterwards. We are currently in the 1787th year since the destruction of Jerusalem, and it is—I do not know as a result of what numerical constellation—the appointed year for the gathering of the Kabbalistic Sanhedrin.'

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‘How do you know that, my friend?’

“That is of no concern to you; do not ask me any questions about it. Suffice it to say, it is so, and what is more, this very evening is the night of the gathering, and this city is the place. I intend, come what may, to attend this gathering and am prepared to take you with me.”

“But won’t this be dishonest eavesdropping, an unlawful intrusion into the secrets of others?”

“*Per Bacco!* As we Italians say, if you have such scruples, then you might as well give up on fulfilling your long-cherished wish altogether. Or do you believe that those men who guard the secret of the Kabbalah will hand it to you on a silver platter? As for me, I intend to discover it come what may!”

The scholar thought for a few moments, then said resolutely: “I shall accompany you, come what may!”

‘Good – then we are in agreement. Let us go, for we have not a moment to lose. It is good that you are wearing dark clothes, as I am. Here, take this short five-barrelled revolver and, like me, resolve from the outset that, should we be discovered, you would rather sacrifice any other life than our own. Come.’

The two men left the bridge and made their way towards the old town. The Italian seemed to be

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perfectly familiar with every nook and cranny or to be guided by landmarks he had noted beforehand; for without making a single mistake, he soon turned off towards the Jewish quarter. He stopped beneath a dark archway, pulled two fake, dark beards from his pocket—which could be easily secured with an elastic band—and handed one to his companion. Having thus made themselves look more like the inhabitants of this eerie part of town, they plunged without hesitation into these narrow, grimy alleyways.

Near the churchyard, the Italian turned left, slipped through a gloomy passageway and, together with his companion, reached the northern wall of the cemetery, against which the houses on this side, with their narrow, foul-smelling courtyards, abut. He must have scouted out a suitable spot here earlier that day, for he soon found, in a dark corner untouched by any ray of light, a pile of rubble and stones reaching halfway up the wall; he tied a knotted rope to a beam, threw the other end over the wall, and, after whispering once more to his companion a solemn warning to remain silent and exercise caution, he climbed onto the wall, carefully draping his cloak over its crest—which was lined with shards of glass—and let himself slide down onto the tangled undergrowth of the graves on the other side.

With the same silence and caution, paying no heed to the various cuts he sustained from the sharp edges of the glass, the scholar followed him. Then Lasali took his bearings by the

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night sky, and signalled to his companion to follow him, crawling on hands and knees over the sunken graves and gravestones, further towards the centre of the churchyard.

Just then, the clock on the Town Hall tower struck the eleventh hour, and with the first chime, both heard the key grinding in the gate.

A deep silence followed this sound, which proved that the churchyard had been opened. However intently they listened, they heard no one enter.

The two of them were now crouched close together on the ground in the hollow between two gravestones overgrown with a thorn hedge, near the pile of stones that forms the grave of Rabbi Simeon Ben Jehuda. In the Jewish houses surrounding the cemetery, the lights began to go out, and all the sounds of the festival fell silent.

An even more eerie silence spread over the eerie place.

Thus the listeners heard clearly and distinctly the first two quarters striking from the city's towers.

Suddenly, the Italian squeezed the scholar's arm.

'Hush – they're coming! Not a sound, whatever you may hear or see!'

The entrance gate creaked softly – then there was a rustling among the hedges and stones, like long, trailing robes – a white, indistinct figure glided silently through the corridors, like a shadow.
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It crouched down by the pile of stones, touched the stones three times with its forehead, and began to murmur a prayer softly.

The German realised that the words were Chaldean, but he had no time to think about it. From the gateway, a figure came hobbling, coughing and groaning down the passageway – an old, stooped figure, almost crawling, felt its way along the even older graves, settled down beside the first figure and joined in with its murmured prayer.

And once more the sound of firm, vigorous footsteps echoed, drawing nearer along the path: a tall, stately figure in the white, flowing taleth, the prayer robe, crouched down as if resentful of the compulsion.

Thirteen times the path was repeated; thirteen ghostly figures had come – the Doctor had counted them, but he could scarcely tell whether they were the living or the dead. A cold shiver ran down his spine – a deep dread made his heart tremble – involuntarily he recalled that eerily sublime tradition of the Day of Atonement on the tenth day of the month of Tishrei in the synagogue at Poznań, where even during the Kol Nidre prayer the congregation grew and grew, figure jostling against figure, wrapped in their prayer robes, hundreds upon hundreds, far beyond the congregation, until the horrified rabbi raised his hands in an incantation and demanded: 'Whoever has flesh upon their cheeks, let them remove the taleth!' And as hundreds remained veiled and the robes were pulled from their heads, one could see their skulls
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of the dead, who had come from their graves to celebrate the festival with the congregation.

Just as there, he now thought he saw the white talethim fall and skulls grin at one another, as the last chime of midnight trembled through the night from the tower and, as the sound faded, a sharp metallic clang rang out and a ghostly blue glow flared up, as it were from the pile of stones, the grave of the old Kabbalist, urgently, and enveloped the thirteen white, veiled figures crouching around the grave.

‘Hail, ye Rosche-Bathe-Aboth[1] of the twelve Shebatim[2] of Israel,’ said a deep voice.

‘Hail to you, O son of the accursed!’

‘A hundred years have passed. Whence come the Nesiims?’[3]

“From whence the wind blows, where the people of Adonai are scattered across the lands whose dominion the Patriarch promised them!”

‘Are you prepared to fulfil the promise in the hundred years to come?’

“We are!”

“Then give the answer of those whom you represent. Does Judah speak?”

“Amsterdam!” replied a strong, firm voice.

“Does Benjamin vote?”

“Toledo!” came the hollow reply. [165]

“Does Levi vote?”

“Worms!”

“Is Manasse there?”

“Buda-Pesth!”

“The tribe of Gad?”

“Krakow!”

“The tribe of Simeon!”

“Rome!”

“Is that Zebulun?”

“Lisbon!”

“The tribe of Reuben?”

“Paris!”

“What about Dan?”

“Constantinople!”

“What about Asher?”

“London!”

“Is it Issachar?”

Those behind the undergrowth could not make out the name murmured by the hoarse, faint voice of the man being called.

“Is that *Naphtali?*”

“Prague!”

‘And I, the representative of the outcasts and the wanderers,’ said the questioner in a deep voice, ‘who roams the world to gather you together for the work of retribution and the promise that was given to the seed of Abraham and taken from him by the sons of the Crucified One! Whoever is of the house of Aaron[5]
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(1) Tribal chiefs. [2] Tribes.

[3] Tribal princes.

[4] Tribe.

[5] Tribe of Levi.

‘Let him rise and examine the chiefs and gather the council!’

The man who had arrived first stood up and sat down by the pile of stones. One by one, the others approached him and whispered the seven-syllable word that had been given to the graveyard keeper that evening, and each time he nodded in agreement.

Then they all took their places again.

‘Brothers,’ said the Levite, ‘our fathers made the covenant which leads the initiates of the Shebatim every hundred years to the tomb of the great Master of the Kabbalah; such is the teaching which grants the chosen ones power on earth, dominion over all the tribes descended from the seed of Ishmael. For eighteen hundred years, the people of Israel have waged the struggle for the dominion promised to Abraham and wrested from us by the Cross. Under the heel of our enemies, under oppression, death and tribulation of every kind, Israel has never abandoned this struggle; and because the people of Abraham have been scattered across the whole earth, the whole earth shall also belong to them! The wise men of our people have led this struggle for centuries, and step by step the people of Israel are rising from their fall; and mighty has become the power which they already exercise, openly and in secret, over thrones and nations; for ours is the God of the Earth, whom Aaron made for us as a comfort in the wilderness—the golden calf before which the apostates bow!‘

‘We hear!’ murmured the circle.

‘When all the gold of the earth is ours, all power [167]
ours. Then the promise given to Abraham will be fulfilled. Gold is the New Jerusalem – it is dominion over the world. It is power, it is retribution, it is pleasure – in short, everything that mankind fears and desires. This is the mystery of the Kabbalah, the doctrine of the Spirit that governs the world, of the future! – Eighteen centuries have belonged to our enemies – the new century belongs to Israel. For the fifth time in this millennial struggle, for which we have at last mustered the courage, the initiates of the secret covenant are gathering at this site to deliberate on the best means afforded by the times and the sins of our enemies; and each time, for five hundred years, the new Sanhedrin has had to proclaim Israel’s progressive victories. Yet no century has enjoyed such successes as this one. Therefore, we may believe that the time for which we strive is near, and we may say: *the future is ours!*’

‘Unless an anti-Semitic smear campaign gets in the way!’ said the man without a clan with bitter scorn; he appeared to be representing the *‘advocatus diavoli’* of the College of Canonisation at this gathering.

‘The dark times of that danger are over. The progress of the so-called civilisation of the Christian peoples is the best protection for our endeavours. Before we hear the counsel of individual voices, let us examine the material power of our people in the present—the *liquid capital* at Israel’s disposal. So let the richest among us
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people on the seven world markets of Europe, and how highly they are valued! Let us begin with *Paris!*”

‘Fould & Co.,’ reported Seken’s voice, ‘20 million francs; A. I. Stern & Co. 30 million; G. L. Halphen & Co. 20 million; Anton Schnapper 15 million; Samuel

von Haber 7 million; H. I. Reinach 7 million; I. E. Kann & Co. 5 million; Bischoffsheim Goldschmidt & Co. 15 million; M. Cahen d'Anvers 5 million. A total of 124 million francs. Added to this are the smaller firms with around 80 million, so that the capital in the hands of the Jewish community in Paris amounts to more than 200 million francs."

"That is forty-seventh of France's national debt," said the Wanderer. "Pereire and Mirés, who are among our own, are estimated at 30 million."

"Go on! What about the report from *London?*"

"Moses Montefiore, 2 million pounds; Moses & Son, Bischoffsheim & Goldschmidt, and the Stern brothers, 1 million each; R. Raphael & Son 800,000; Louis Cohen & Son, Samuel Montague, each 500,000 pounds, totalling 6,800,000. The smaller firms in the City amount to over 4 million – totalling 11 million pounds or 260 million francs in London."

'I notice that Seken omits the Rothschilds, the princes of the stock exchange!'

"They must be mentioned specifically," explained the Levite. "The report from *Vienna*."

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"Moritz Königswarter 14 million guilders," reported the third voice; "Herman To-descos S. 15 million; M. L. Biedermann & Co., Max Springer, Ephrussi & Co. and Eduard Wiener, each one and a half million; Ludw. Ladenburg 2, Fr. Schey 2½, Leop. Epstein 3 million—nes. A total of 46½ million; the smaller firms 14 million; a total of 61 million gulden or 152 million francs in *Vienna*."

'Austrian bonds are cheap! 2,268 million guilders of national debt. If the country goes bankrupt, our wealth will double!'

"*Berlin!*"

"S. Bleichröder, Mendelssohn & Co., H. C. Plaut and S. Herz, 1 million thalers each; N. Reichenheim & S. and Liebermann & Co., 2 million each; Hermann Gerson and M. E. Levy, 1½ million each; Joël Meyer 1½, Moritz Güterbock ¾, Louis Rieß & Co. 1¼ million; in total 13½ million thalers. The smaller houses 10 million – together about 24 million thalers or 90 million francs."

'So one-twelfth of the national debt is in our hands. Nevertheless, the sum is small – the ratio must change.'

"The report from *Hamburg!*"

"H. B. Oppenheimer 4; I. G. Oppenheimer, the Jaffé brothers, Pintus Nathan Sohn, each 2 million marks; Behrens Söhne 1½; Ferdin. Jacobson, Samuel Levy Söhne, L. R. Veit & Co., A. Alexander, Lieben Königswarter, M. M. Warburg, Consul H. Jonas & Co., Julius [170] Leser, Martin M. Fränkel: one each; Mendelsohn Bartholdy 3 million marks; in *Altona,* Amsel Jacob Ree 1; Hesse Newmann 1, W. S. Warburg 2 million, totalling 27½ million; together with the other firms, amounting to some 40 million marks or 75 million francs. But the wealth of the Christian firms is, alas, even greater! 'Our people still cannot make headway in this rigid imperial city!'

'*Frankfurt* am Main!'

"B. H. Goldschmidt 7 million guilders; Marcus Königswarter, Jacob S. H. Stern and the Sulzbach brothers, 2 each; Lazarus Speyer Ellissen 1½; Ed. Moses Kann and Co. 1 million. The smaller firms

, together with the lottery collectors, amount to some 8 million. Added to this are the princes of capital, the affiliated *Rothschild* houses in London, Paris, Frankfurt and Vienna, with at least one hundred million – that makes a total of 123 million guilders or 260 million francs."

'The House of E. M. Günzburg in *St Petersburg* is valued at 2 million roubles; our houses in *Rome* and *Naples* at 20 million livres; in *Amsterdam*: Hollander & Lehven, Lippmann Rosenthal & Co., Becher & Fould, Werthheim & Gompertz at 40 million guilders. If we add these figures together, the verifiable wealth of Israel in just ten major cities amounts to 1,165 million francs. And then there are the second-tier cities! Brothers, we may safely assume that – without even counting the common people – the major capital holders of Israel already have at their disposal a capital of *two thousand million francs* in Europe today!"

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An approving murmur from the Twelve served as the reply.

"That works out at 600 francs per head for 3½ million Jews in Europe," remarked the representative of the stateless. "But those 3½ million, with their money, are up against 265 million enemies in Europe, or 500 million fists!"

'The mind will defeat the fist, just as it has defeated it hitherto. Labour is the servant of speculation; violence is the servant of reason. Who would deny that cunning is the gift of our people?'

"It is vain and greedy, haughty and hedonistic!"

'Where there is light, there are also shadows. It is not for nothing that Adonai, the Lord, has given his chosen people the tenacity of the serpent, the cunning of the fox, the gaze of the falcon, the memory of the dog, the industriousness of the ant and the loyal fellowship of the beaver. We were in captivity by the waters of Babylon and have become mighty! They destroyed our temple and we have built a thousand! They enslaved us for eighteen hundred years in the dust, yet our head has risen above the nations and we shall enslave them once more, as long as the world endures!"

'The number of those going to be baptised is growing!' said the sceptic grimly.

'Fool!' said the Levite. 'Has your wandering through the lands of the earth not yet taught you that water does not wash away the spirit, but only the

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flesh? Let their missionary societies foolishly squander their money! Did not even the haughty *Times* recently calculate that every Jewish soul converted by the English mission costs 250,000 francs? And did we not ourselves pray for the apostates on the Day of Atonement? For truly, I say to you, it is not the Jew who becomes a Christian, but the Christian who becomes a Jew for generations to come through the intermingling of the flesh. The baptised are the steps upon which we climb the paths still closed to our people; for each one stands with us and not with those who, despite their baptism, are not of his body and spirit; unless, that is, Israel itself were to cast them out as lepers!'

The Twelve in the circle muttered a curse: the Doctor felt the Italian's hand clench convulsively and tightly around his arm.

'Be silent and listen!'

'Brothers,' said the Levite's voice, 'it is time that, in accordance with our founder's statutes—each of us drawing on the experience of a hundred years—we set out the paths by which

Israel must be guided so that it may reach its goal. We, the knowledgeable ones, are the leaders who guide the blind multitude. We are the builders who assemble the dead stones of the tower, so that it may rise up to the heavens."

'The Tower of Babylon was shattered by the hand of Him whom I must not name,' said the Man Without a Tribe.

'Our edifice stands upon the foundation of the promise,
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which was given to Abraham. Begin, then, your speech, Tribe *of Reuben!* How will Israel gain the power and dominion over all the peoples of the earth that is rightfully hers?"

A clear, sharp voice, with a certain cutting edge to it, spoke as follows:

'All the princes and nations of Europe are in debt today. The stock market regulates these debts. However, such transactions can only be carried out with mobile capital; therefore, all mobile capital must be in the hands of Israel. A good start has already been made, as we have just heard. By controlling the stock market, we control the wealth of the states. That is why we must make it easier for governments to run up debts, so that we can bring the states ever more firmly under our control. If possible, the capital must be made to pledge state institutions as security: railways, revenues, mines, rights and estates. – Furthermore, the stock exchange is the means of transferring the wealth and savings of the common people into the hands of the capitalists by luring them into stock market speculation. Speculative purchases of securities are a fortunate invention of our people, and even if stockbrokers cheat one another, it is always the imprudent who ultimately foot the bill.'

The voice – which had no doubt often been heard on the great Paris Stock Exchange – fell silent. 'Do the Sekenim agree with our brother's opinion?' asked the Levite.

An approving murmur was the reply.

'The tribe of *Simeon* has the floor!' [174]

A solemn, deep voice, whose tone and words bore witness to profound reflection, reached the ears of those listening.

'Land ownership will always remain the ironclad and indestructible wealth of every country. It confers, in and of itself, power, prestige and influence. Land ownership must therefore pass into the hands of Israel. This is easy if we control the mobile capital. Israel's primary aim must therefore be to displace the current owners from their landholdings. Large landholdings are particularly dangerous to us. We must therefore make it easier for the young nobility in the major cities to run up debts. Through the fear of scandal, we shall ruin the aristocratic fortunes and weaken the influence of the aristocracy. Land must be mobilised by turning it into a readily tradable commodity. The more we work towards the greatest possible fragmentation of land ownership, the more easily and cheaply we shall acquire it. To this end, capital must be withdrawn from mortgages for the long term, and their insecurity must be widespread. Under the pretence of wishing to alleviate the plight of the poorer classes and ease their labour, taxes and levies at both national and local levels must be imposed solely on land ownership. Once the land is in our hands, the toil of the Christian tenants and labourers must yield us tenfold interest.'

The man without a clan laughed scornfully. ‘The advice is sound, but not new. Ask in Paris and Vienna who
[175]
already own the houses! The Damno, my invention, is an excellent means of ruining the owners!”

Once again, the assembly murmured their approval.

‘Tribe *of Judah*, it’s your turn!’

The voice that rose had a persuasive, aggressive tone that smacked of ells and thalers.

‘The artisan class—that force of the bourgeoisie standing in Israel’s way, just as landownership is the force of the nobility—must be ruined. The artisan must be nothing other than a labourer. The best means to this end is unconditional freedom of trade. Let the factory owner take the place of the master craftsman. Since he need not work himself, but only speculate, the children of Israel can in this way turn their hands to all branches of labour. Their capital and their dexterity will replace skill. By transforming the artisans into our factory workers, we simultaneously control the masses for political ends. Anyone who resists this system must be destroyed by competition! The public is a thoughtless and ungrateful mass; it will abandon the artisan in this struggle if it can obtain goods slightly more cheaply from the manufacturer.’

The swift assent of the new Sanhedrin proved that the truths of this counsel had long been understood and followed.

‘It is my turn,’ said the Levite. ‘I speak on behalf of the tribe of Aaron. [176]

‘Israel’s natural adversary is the Christian Church. We must therefore undermine it. Its divisions make this easier. We must foster free-thinking, doubt, unbelief and strife within it. Hence, constant warfare in the press against the Christian priesthood, and suspicion and mockery of it. A main pillar of the Church is the school. We must therefore gain influence over the education of Christian youth. Hence, first of all, the separation of school from the Church. Under the banner of progress and the equality of all religions: the transformation of Christian schools into non-denominational institutions. Then Jews can become teachers in all schools; Christian education will be confined to the home, and since the masses have no time for it, the religious devotion of the upper classes will be shaken and will soon cease altogether. We must campaign for the abolition of the churches’ and schools’ private ownership, and for the transfer of church and school assets to the state—and thus, sooner or later, into the hands of Israel!”

A murmur of approval accompanied the speaker’s words; not a single voice was raised in opposition. Then he continued:

‘The Seken of the tribe of *Issachar* has the floor.’

It was the trembling voice of an old man that spoke thus:

‘May the brothers work towards the abolition of armed force. The harsh life of military service is not for the children of Israel; not everyone is a Gideon! Armies are the prop of thrones, and the schools of a narrow-minded
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patriotism. It is not the sword, but the spirit and money that must rule. Therefore, at every opportunity, belittle and cast suspicion upon the military class amongst the people, and stir up discord between the two. Mercenaries are sufficient to maintain law and order and to protect the property-owning class against the propertyless.'

'The Lion of Judah has made his voice heard,' said the Wanderer scornfully. 'David vanquished Goliath. In future, the peoples will live in dressing gowns instead of the warrior's shiryon[1]! A slap on the stock exchange will be like a battle won!'

A storm of indignation at the insolent mockery seemed about to rise within the circle, but a word from the Elder calmed them.

'He is the son of Belial! Let him speak, but he will do as the Council of the Shebatim has decided.

Let the tribe *of Zebulun* speak.'

A voice, rumbling as deeply as a distant thunderstorm, spoke as follows:

'Our people are, at heart, a conservative lot, clinging to the old and the established. But our advantage now demands that we join in with zeal—that is to say, that we lead the movements which are shaking the world to its core. It is undeniable that a drive for reform is sweeping through our age, but the original intent of this drive is the reform of the material realm—that is, the material conditions of the needy classes. For such a reform, however, the haves [178]
classes would have to make sacrifices, first and foremost capital. Yet capital is in the hands of Israel. That is why it was Israel's task to take an active part in the movement, in order to steer it from the realm of social reforms over into the field of political ones. The masses as such are always blind and foolish and allow themselves to be led by the demagogues. But who shouts as loudly and as cleverly as Israel? That is why our people were at the forefront on the platforms, at the forefront in the newspapers and in the Christian societies! The more societies and gatherings there are, the greater the discontent and the reluctance to work. This necessarily leads to the impoverishment of the people—and thus their subjugation to those who have the money—whilst at the same time increasing our wealth. Moreover, every upheaval brings us money, for it ruins the little man and increases his debts. The instability of the thrones increases our power and our influence. Therefore, let there be perpetual unrest! Every revolution yields interest on our capital and brings us closer to our goal!'

A prolonged silence followed these dreadful words, as if every member
of the mysterious Sanhedrin were pondering their dreadful implications.

The Son of Belial let out another hoarse laugh. 'Do you fear blood? It is not your own!'

Then one of them began to murmur his assent, and the others followed suit.

'Son of the tribe *of Dan*, it is your turn!' [179]

Even the tone of his voice bore the mark of the lowly Jewish type.

'All trade, in which there is speculation and profit, must be in our hands. It is our birthright. Above all, we must control the trade in spirits, in oil, in wool and in grain. Then we shall have agriculture and the land in our hands. We can produce daily bread everywhere, and should discontent and hardship arise,

[1] Panzer.

‘It is easy to shift the blame and the outcry from ourselves onto the governments. The menial tasks, which involve much toil and yield little reward, may remain in the hands of the Christians. Let them toil and torment themselves, just as the Chosen People have tormented themselves for many hundreds of years.’

The speech scarcely needed approval. The Levite called out to the next man: ‘Tribe *of Naphtali!*’

The words that followed rang out sharply and deliberately.

‘All public offices must be open to us! Once this principle is established, the Jewish candidate’s shrewdness and tenacity will soon secure for him those positions held by those who are truly influential; for it is only a matter of those offices that bring external honour, power and advantage. Those that require labour and knowledge may be kept by the Christians. That is why the Israelite spurns subordinate posts. The judiciary is of the utmost importance to us; the legal profession is a great step forward. It is in keeping with the spirit of shrewdness and tenacity of our people and grants us insight into and power over the circumstances of our natural adversaries. Why should a Jew not

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also become Minister of Religious Affairs under the principle of parity, since Jews have already served as Ministers of Finance in more than one state?’

‘Think of Haman’s gallows! Of the fate of Süß and Lippold!’ said the warning voice.

“Why does the raven caw about times past, which lie behind us and have been overcome! Is not one of our own people a great minister in France, honoured by the Emperor himself?!”

There was a note of satisfied pride in the approval given to the speaker, who thus continued:

‘Our men must take their place amongst the lawmakers of the state. The exceptional laws of the goyim concerning the children of Israel must be abolished everywhere, whilst we preserve the statutes of our fathers. We no longer need laws for our protection; now we must ensure laws that grant us benefits! A lenient bankruptcy law, which should be in the interests of humanity, is like a gold mine in our hands. Above all, we must ensure that usury laws are repealed in all countries, under the pretext that this will make money cheaper. Money is a commodity like any other, and the law itself must grant us the right to raise its price as our advantage demands.

‘Let the messenger from the tribe *of Benjamin* speak.’

‘What more shall I say in response to the counsel of such wise men? Israel, too, shall have glory and honour; therefore it must push itself to the forefront of all associations where there is honour and no danger, and throw itself into those branches

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of science and art which most readily suit the character of our people. We can become great actors, great philosophers and great composers, for in all three fields speculation finds its place. In the arts, our people will ensure we receive applause and shower us with incense. In science, it is medicine

and philosophy that we wish to hold fast to. They afford the most scope for theory and speculation. The doctor delves into the secrets of families and holds life in his hands.'

'Tribe of *Asher*, it is your turn!'

'We must demand free marriage between Jews and Christians. Israel can only profit from this, even if it does taint its blood. Let our sons and daughters marry into the noble and powerful Christian families. We provide the money and gain influence in return. Christian kinship has no effect on us, but we shall exert influence over them. That is one thing. – The other is that we honour the Jewish woman and prefer to indulge forbidden lust on the women of our enemies. We have the money, and for money even virtue is for sale. A Jew must never make a daughter of his own people a harlot; if he wishes to transgress the sixth commandment, there are plenty of Christian girls available for that.'

'Why else would the pretty goyim whores be employed in the brothels?' interjected the representative of the evil principle scornfully. 'Those who refuse to submit to our lust receive no work, and therefore no bread! We
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must also allow our young men some pleasure. Go to the great cities, and you will see that they have certainly not waited for your wisdom to act. Let the labourer be content with our cast-off clothes! – Turn Christian marriage from a sacrament into a *contract*, and their wives and daughters will be even more willing in our hands!"

The appalling cynicism of these words, which struck such a raw nerve, did not fail to make an impression on those who held to the strict views of the old doctrine regarding moral purity.

'What does the law say?' asked a voice from among the Twelve.

'Death for adultery with a woman of our people; deflowering a virgin may be atoned for with a fine, unless she is a betrothed bride. Then death! The law judges carnal offences with a slave girl leniently – her body belongs to her master!'

'Are the goyim to be better than our slaves?' The
explanation was followed by murmurs of agreement.

'Let the tribe of *Manasseh* speak.'

The last of the speakers raised his hand significantly and moved it slowly from side to side as he spoke, as if to reinforce the impact of his words. His voice was rasping and unpleasant, full of arrogance and audacity. But he spoke confidently and eloquently.

'If gold is the first power in the world, then [183]
the press is the second. What are all the opinions and advice given here without its support! Only when we have the press in our hands will we achieve our goal. Our people must control the daily press. We are skilful and shrewd, and we possess money which we know how to put to work for our purposes. We must control the major political newspapers, which shape public opinion, the critics, street literature, the telegrams and the theatre. From there we shall, step by step, drive out the Christians; then we can dictate to the world what it is to believe, what it is to hold in high esteem

and what it is to condemn. We shall make the cry of Israel's woe resound in a hundred forms, along with the lament over the oppression that weighs upon us! Then – *whilst every individual is against us – the masses, in their folly, will always be for us!* With the press in our hands, we can turn right into wrong, and shame into honour. We can shake thrones and tear families apart. We can undermine faith in everything our enemies have hitherto held in high esteem. We can ruin credit and stir up passions. We can make war and peace, and bestow glory or disgrace. We can exalt talent or denigrate it, persecute it and silence it to death. Whoever holds the press holds the ear of the people. When Israel holds the gold and the press, it will be able to ask: 'On what day shall we look up, ascend the Ataroch[1] that is our due, mount the Chisse[2] of the [184]
Promise and wield the Schebet[3] of power over the peoples of the earth!'

An almost impetuous round of applause followed these words, and for several minutes the deeply moved listeners could make out little of what was being said. But then the Levite's voice rose again and called for silence.

'The Roshe-Bathe-Aboth of the twelve Shebatim have spoken wise and weighty words. They shall be the pillars of the age to come, when the Son of the "Restless One" inscribes them in his memory and sows their seed amongst the people of Israel, so that it may grow from morning till evening and from midday till midnight like a mighty tree. They shall be the Chereb[4] with which Israel strikes down its enemies! The seed of Jacob must hold together in good fortune, in wealth and in power, just as it has held together in misfortune and in danger. Everyone must help one another. Where one has set one foot, he must follow with the other—that is, his brother! – If one has suffered misfortune, the others must help him up! If one has come into conflict with the law of the world, the brothers must help him through it, provided he lives in peace with the law of our people. Even one who has spent ten years in prison can still become a rich man, before whom the princes and counts of the goyim must bow, provided only that our people do not abandon him. If
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Everyone is against us, yet all will be for us. The hand of the Lord has led us, after forty years in the wilderness, to rule over the land of Canaan, and it will lead us, after forty-five times forty years of our wanderings in misery, to rule over lands fifty-five times larger than Canaan! If Israel follows the counsel decreed by the Sanhedrin of the Kabbalah, our grandchildren, when they come to this place in a hundred years' time to the tomb of the founder of our covenant, will be able to proclaim to him that they are the true princes of the world, and that the promise made to the people of Israel—that they shall rule over all other nations as their servants—has been fulfilled! 'Renew your oath, O sons of the golden calf, and go forth to the four corners of the earth!'

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[1] The crown.
[2] The throne.
[3] The sceptre.
[4] The sword.

And the bluish light shone ever more brightly from the rabbi's grave, around which the Thirteen now walked, murmuring songs, each of them throwing a new stone—which he drew from beneath his robes—onto the pile of stones.

It seemed to the Doctor as though a golden, shapeless animal figure were glistening atop the grave in the ghostly blue glow – then suddenly, with the same sharp metallic clang with which the light had appeared, it vanished, and deep, monotonous darkness enveloped the eerie churchyard.

Here and there, solitary white figures flitted between the graves – the gate creaked softly – – it was not the night wind that set them moving in their rusty hinges!

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From the city's towers, the clocks struck the first hour of the day.

The scholar still lay motionless in his hiding place – he dared not make a single movement – so terrible and overwhelming was the impact of what he had heard.

At last, a sound at his side indicated that his companion beside him had risen, and with a deep, heavy breath he tried to do the same.

He raised himself – leaning on one arm – halfway up, when the unexpected sight that met his eyes made his blood run cold and paralysed every fibre of his being.

Half-kneeling on the nearest sunken gravestone, bent over, he saw the Italian raise his right fist as if for a murderous blow, and in that fist, glinting in the starlight, was the sharp steel of a stiletto.

The features of his face, usually so cold, haughty and mocking, had taken on a truly diabolical expression – his eyes seemed to radiate a greenish fire, like the eye of a cat in the night, or that of a tiger as it pounces on its defenceless prey.

'Lasali – my friend! – what are you about to do? Do you intend to murder me?'

In the starlight, the dagger glinted, his eyes glowed – then, as if seized by a sudden thought, the dreadful man lowered his arm, rose to his feet and stepped back.

'No –' he said grimly – 'those thoughts are not of my own making, and I am too proud to commit a second

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role and be nothing more than her accomplice! It will be a greater glory to fight her. – Stand up, man – you have nothing more to fear!"

The scholar rose – only when he was back on his feet, man to man, and grasped the revolver that the other had himself given him, did he feel some calm and security return.

'What were you intending to do, Lasali – why did you raise the dagger against me, the man who brought you here?'

'Because I wanted to murder you, Doctor!' said the Italian coldly. 'Another moment, and you would have been as silent as the stones of these graves, and the secret would have belonged to me alone! – Or do you believe that the blood of Judah in my veins would not have rebelled at the thought that an uninvited stranger, a Christian, knew of the great and mighty work of placing Israel on the throne of all nations? Truly, had I been one of those Thirteen, you would have died by my hand, even though you had saved my life ten times over; for the idea of this dominion is great and sublime. But it is not my work, and they have chosen another to propagate and carry it out – therefore it must be opposed, and I take

up the fight against your idol of power, the golden calf, and intend to smash it to smithereens, just as Moses did in the wilderness with its image!”

‘What we have heard is shocking; it threatens the whole of civilised society,’ said the scholar.
[188]
‘Take my hand; I will be your companion in the struggle against this power of gold!’

The Italian shook his head, rejecting his companion’s hand. ‘No,’ he said firmly, ‘what I do, I will do alone, and the honour shall be mine. There is still a power which, when gathered and used correctly, is just as formidable as gold. It is *poverty*, it is *labour!* I will rally them and lead them into battle. Proud Israel, beware! For I set *social democracy* against you!”

‘And I,’ said the scholar enthusiastically, ‘I will lead all that is noble and lofty—science, the ideal, faith—into battle against this materialism of money, through the written word and speech.’

His companion smiled scornfully. ‘Your ideals will shatter against it, like clay against metal. Only the brute force of fists and the battalions of hunger are the fighters who can defeat the golden calf! – Our paths part here – you go your way, I mine! My word is given – but remember yours, your oath: to keep silent about everything you have seen and heard here!”

‘I shall keep my word; the mystery of the Kabbalah does not prevent me from combating the visible manifestations of its endeavours!’

‘Then come – we can begin our retreat from the grave of the most venerable and wise Rabbi Simeon and need fear no further discovery.’[«]
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How wrong he was to think so!

The two had reached the spot where they had climbed over the wall, and the Italian was just swinging himself over when a loud voice bellowed from the entrance to the churchyard: “Ganovim! Ganovim![1] Grave robbers! Stop! Stop!”

Quite simply, the following had happened.

The curiosity characteristic of his people had kept the churchyard watchman awake, and although—in accordance with the strict command he had been given, which he was bound by his oath to observe—he had not dared to listen outside, he had nevertheless – after sending the guests of the supper away on some pretext and putting his family to bed – remained in his clothes in the dark room and peered through the slats of the shutters.

He saw the white figures creep past and disappear into the open gate of the churchyard, and waited patiently until the clock struck one. Then the mysterious figures returned, one by one, turning right and left without exchanging a word – *thirteen* – he had counted them and now hurriedly withdrew from the gap in the shutter when he saw the last one approaching the window.

There was a knock on the shutter and a hoarse voice said, as if it had known he had stayed awake: ‘Close the House of Life, Guardian of Those of the Resurrection

[1] Thieves!

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await! – and may your mouth be sealed with the seal of Solomon for a hundred years!' The figure flitted away, but the guardian of the cemetery did not dare to
leave the house until he had finally convinced himself that – whatever those mysterious figures might have been up to – it was all over. Only then did he set off, leave the house and creep towards the open gate of the churchyard.

He could not resist taking a glance into the cemetery, even though horror made his limbs shiver, and he stepped quietly into the space.

It had seemed to him as though he had heard someone speaking. At first he wanted to turn back – but curiosity, and perhaps also a sense of duty, drove him forward.

Now, in the uncertain yet sufficient light of the stars, he saw two men standing by the opposite wall, about to scale it. He had seen thirteen enter the churchyard and thirteen leave it. They could therefore only be people who did not belong to that group – grave robbers – burglars – thieves –

Immediately his shrill cry rang out: 'Ganowim! Ganowim!' – –

'Get away! We've been betrayed! Save yourselves as best you can!' whispered the Italian to his companion, leaping off the wall towards the outside and ruthlessly snatching his cloak with him. 'I'll go left, you go right! – Silence until death!'

With a desperate effort, whilst behind [191]
the gatekeeper was shouting behind him, the scholar had reached the top of the wall. His hands and knees were bleeding from twenty wounds – fortunately, the previous attempt to scale the wall at this point had already broken off most of the shards; otherwise, he would scarcely have been able to negotiate the perilous passage. Without a moment's hesitation, he threw himself down from the wall onto the pile of rubble, for despite the late hour, the gatekeeper's shouts were already beginning to alarm the neighbouring houses, and the occasional strangely veiled head peered out of the windows and joined in the clamour when they saw the fleeing figures.

The doctor had heard his companion running off to the left, and he hurried off in the opposite direction, without knowing whether he would find a way out of the labyrinth of these narrow alleys here, or where it might lead. The noise behind him grew ever louder as he ran along the wall; – he thought of the revolver he was carrying and that he could sell his freedom or his life dearly – but with a keen sense of reluctance at the thought of perhaps causing innocent people to suffer for his adventure in the heat of the moment, he threw it aside. Immediately afterwards, he heard the blast of a watchman's horn ahead of him and the clatter of the pike on the cobblestones.

Turning into a dark side alley at that very moment, he saw before him an even darker, yawning opening: the open hallway of one of the old, overhanging houses.

Driven by danger, without a moment's hesitation, [192]
into the dark hallway, felt for the door with his hand, pulled it shut and bolted it. Breathing heavily, he stood still, listening, and soon heard several people running past the door and others walking up and down, talking.

He was trapped in the very place where he had sought safety.

After a moment's thought, he realised full well that he could not remain where he was. The fact that the door was open proved that there were still occupants of the house outside it. They could return at any moment and would then undoubtedly discover him. He therefore had to find a hiding place where he could wait for their return and for an opportunity to escape unnoticed—which was impossible at that moment, as, despite all his fumbling, he could not find the latch on the door from the inside.

Feeling his way with his hands and feet, he groped cautiously forward along the pitch-black corridor, along walls that were as dirty and damp as those of a cave. After about ten paces, he felt an opening in the wall, a rope in place of a banister, and the worn steps of a staircase.

He climbed them, counting them carefully so that he would know the height should he need to retreat.

There were eighteen steps. When he reached the top and felt his way along the wall in the deep darkness, a faint beam of light suddenly appeared, seeming to shine onto the floor through a crack in a door.

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His confusion now grew even greater; he really did not know what to do. At last he resolved to press on, despite the risk of being discovered and of finding people who would mercilessly hand him over to his pursuers.

After a few steps, he reached the door from beneath which the light was shining.

He pressed his ear against it – not a sound could be heard. Resolute, he finally placed his hand on the handle and the door opened without the slightest sound.

He found himself in a sort of antechamber, filthy, shabby and filled with rubbish; but a bright glow of light streamed through a half-open door opposite the one through which he had entered. A closer look revealed that this door formed a sort of sliding cupboard, which must have covered it when normally closed.

Along with the light, a delightful fragrance—which seemed entirely out of place in this filthy, foul-smelling environment—and a spicy, comforting warmth flooded into the antechamber.

He crept quietly closer – a heavy curtain of precious tapestry hung half-drawn back on the inside of the door. Through the opening, he peered into an adjoining, fairly spacious room.

What he saw was like a dream from One Thousand and One Nights, an oriental fairy tale!

And this dream was not lacking the fairy herself, for lying on a broad divan of sea-green Persian silk was – – –

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DON JUAN!

The Bay of *Biarritz* in the great Bay of Biscay is one of the most beautiful spots on the European coast.

The traveller coming from Bayonne may well see the blue wall of the Pyrenees before him at the railway station, but he has as yet no view of the sea, which is so close, as the shore is high and mountainous. Only when the carriage or the traveller on foot reaches its summit does the

magnificent panorama of the mighty Atlantic Ocean, hemmed in between France and Spain, and allows the spellbound gaze to wander from the splendid hues of the sea—whose foaming crests break against the rocks jutting out into the flood like lost outposts—to the long lines of the white cliffs towering high and steep above the vast expanse of water.

There, on the right-hand side of the panorama, the magnificent lighthouse rises on a high promontory; beyond it, the view follows the coastline of the Landes far into the distance, until it is lost in the infinity of the water's expanse,

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which God has set in the west of France and which the ambition of its inhabitants has never once crossed with impunity. Sheltered by the receding high cliff face, at the foot of this lighthouse, like an oasis amidst this landscape of rock and waves, lies Villa Eugénie with its open gardens—a gift from the second Emperor of the Bonaparte family to the beautiful Spanish lady.

Just as France and Spain join hands on the Bay of Biscay, so this villa, in marble and gold, embodies the alliance between these two illustrious figures.

After a brief interval—the sand dune and the earth, which seem to symbolise the distance between the Imperial Circle and the rest of the world—these gardens give way to the stretch of coastline belonging to the bathers and the inhabitants of the small town; in the distance, the stretch of sand covered by the tide with its simple bathing pavilions; on the high embankment clad in dark greenery, the magnificent Hôtel Gardère and the large building of the casino or social club; and rising above these, against the mountainside, the church with its white tower and the rows of houses, most of which are already built in the Spanish style. Jutting rock formations, in whose open cavities the waves howl, and on whose outermost tip devout hands have built a chapel, mark the end of this first section of the majestic panorama on the left – as it were, the French side of it.

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The Spanish side is of an even more sublime and imposing effect.

Once you have passed through the natural rock archway along the narrow path hugging the mountainside—which leads to the cliff of the Holy Virgin—you reach the barren heights where the telegraph station and the customs officers' observatory stand.

The broad, surging waves of the ocean break foaming against the long, stretching rock face; the thunder of the crashing sea and the howling of the wind drown out the sound of the human voice.

Far off on the southern horizon, the blue mountainous coastline of Biscay and Aragon stretches out into the open sea until it ends at Cape Ortegal. The white walls of Fuentarrabia and the maritime fortress of San Sebastián gleam across the Bidassoa from the shore.

Yes, there lies the land of El Cid – behind those mountains lies all the poetry of the names Valencia, Granada, Catalonia, Andalusia, Castile – –

There, in the Court of the Lions at the Alhambra, the heads of the noble Abencerrages fell – from there set out the discoverer of a new world – from there thundered the cannons of Talavera, first shaking the throne of the mighty warrior-emperor – there the moon casts its silvery glow over the vast ruins of the Generalife, and the Escorial mourns that its

lightning has gone out! There, the daring Espada still wields his deadly weapon beneath his red cloak, and the castanets in dainty fingers entice the listener to a voluptuous fandango.
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Spain – land of poetry and beggars, of a mighty history and rancid Olla Potri-da, of beauty, love, serenades and revolutions! Land of oranges and favourites, of military mobs, of blue blood and blue skies, home of Pepita, Pansa and Don Juan – I salute you!

———

The guards at the entrances to the Villa Eugénie and the presence of a large number of new faces amongst the bathers indicated that the imperial court was in attendance.

Indeed, following their official visits to Nice and Savoy, their visit to Corsica – the ancient cradle of the Napoleons – and their return from Algiers, the Emperor and Empress had decided on a brief stay in Biarritz and had arrived two days earlier.

Here, too, people take their baths in the morning and spend the afternoon and evening on the promenade. That morning, the Spanish countesses—the most famous beauties of both high society and the lower echelons of Parisian society—had been flirting with the ocean's waves in the famous débardeur outfit; – the time for the grand promenade attire had arrived, and the exquisite outfits from the ateliers of the leading milliners on *Rue Richelieu* rivalled the coquettish mantillas of the black-eyed beauties from beyond the Pyrenees.

Slowly, along the beach, a distinguished party approached from the imperial villa, to whom everyone respectfully made way from afar.
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A lady led the way, holding by the hand a boy of about four, dressed in the pretty Spanish costume of the Pyrenean seaside resorts; as she walked, she used her walking stick to draw figures in the sand, whilst from time to time she raised her delicate and beautifully shaped head to listen to a gentleman walking half a step behind her at her side, whose black, cassock-like robes, bearing a cross on the chest, indicated the high rank of a papal prelate.

At a distance of about fifteen paces, so that they could not hear the conversation of the two people walking ahead, a whole party of elegantly dressed ladies and gentlemen followed, engaged in light conversation.

However, the gaze of the crowd standing quietly on the bank did not turn from the first lady and the clergyman to this party, but immediately to a man who was following at some distance, accompanied by a group consisting of several officers and gentlemen in civilian dress.

It was impossible to mistake this medium-sized, somewhat ponderous figure with his stony or impassive face, his slightly shuffling gait and his downcast eyes. Europe's satirical journals have for years made his caricatured mask a recurring figure, and the cabinets of the entire globe listen for his New Year's addresses.

To the Emperor's left walked a gentleman in a tailcoat, decorated with the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour and a star on his chest, who carried in his hand or under his arm a small green saffian leather portfolio, from which he
[199]
from time to time took a sheet of note paper, glancing at it to complete his speech. On the other side walked an officer in uniform bearing the insignia of the rank of marshal. As with the first group, the military and court cavaliers followed at a respectful distance, and behind them a few footmen.

It was noticeable that, as the party approached, those members of the public whose presence we had noted earlier formed, as it were, a sort of guard of honour or moving chain, directing their utmost attention to their surroundings.

'Consider the matter in Syria settled,' said the gentleman who was leading the others. 'The 3,500 Christians who were massacred in Lebanon and Damascus in May and June will not be brought back to life by the fact that Mr Fuad Pasha had his colleague Ahmed in Damascus and a hundred or two hundred of the executioners shot or hanged; but these *mass* executions deprive us of the pretext for keeping our troops in Syria. In any case, the Marshal here is not very keen on this dispersal of the army. Consider for yourself: the army in Algeria, 4,000 in China, 6,000 men in Syria, 20,000 of our best troops in Rome – that is a significant drain on the Marshal's plans on the Rhine should Austria, as a result of the unpleasant agreement with Russia, once again declare war on Italy, even if we were to leave these impatient fools to their own devices.«
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The remarks concerning the Minister of War's alleged plans were made with a certain irony.

"Sire," he said at once, "the new suggestion of acquiring the Rhine border did not come from me!"

"Oh, I know! Do not worry – if necessary, we can pin it on the Bourbons. Is that not so, Thouvenel?"

'Your Majesty knows full well that this was already discussed at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, when Hardenberg proposed the formation of a Catholic state on the Rhine with the King of Saxony at its head.'

"Yes, and Talleyrand successfully thwarted it! But I'm talking about later."

'It was in 1829 when the Duke of Mortenart, our envoy in St Petersburg, acting on behalf of King Charles X, put forward to the Russian Cabinet almost the same proposals that Your Majesty had set out in the memorandum of 1853, and whose rejection was the cause of the Oriental War and the destruction of Sevastopol.'

"Always this Russia – it pursues the most perfidious policy in the whole of Europe and always knows how to wriggle out of one's grasp like an eel when one thinks one has it."

'Sire,' said the minister, 'you will recall that I advised against having the Russian Cabinet, in May, convey to the Prince Regent of Prussia the proposal to cede the left bank of the Rhine to France
[201]
and, in return, to re-draw its borders in Germany as it saw fit!"

The Emperor turned round and looked at him sharply. “And do you really believe that a man of such strong character as the Prince Regent will not do the latter sooner or later, but then without France deriving any benefit from it, and at the expense of Austria, which will then regret not having accepted my proposal at Villafranca?”

‘Sire,’ said the minister, ‘the Germans are a peculiar people, and the Prussians the most tenacious of all. It would be a breach of my duty if I were to tell you that, despite all the internal political discord and disputes with which Germany is currently rife, there is not the slightest sympathy for France amongst the people themselves. Not even on the Rhine. Any attempt to force the Rhine border now would immediately unite all parties. The only thing our policy can count on is the dynastic jealousy of the German princes – not merely that between the two great powers, but that of the smaller states towards Prussia.”

‘There was a great deal of love and unity at the Congress of Princes in Baden-Baden,’ remarked the Emperor mockingly.

‘I understand Your Majesty perfectly! But I believe that the response given by the King of Hanover to the German press—by elevating his minister von Borries to the rank of count after the latter had, in the Hanoverian Chamber, stated that one must [202]
‘rather call upon a foreign power – namely France – for help against a Prussian central authority’ – will one day be held heavily against that prince by the German nation!”

‘But Prussia has no friends whatsoever in Germany!’

‘It will have them as soon as a national cause is at stake! Your Majesty must not believe that I would in any way oppose a desire which the whole of France cherishes most ardently, and for which the army – I refer to the Marshal – would fight with even greater enthusiasm than it did at Magenta and Solferino. But I simply do not consider this to be the right moment.”

“Sum up your reasons!”

“Your Majesty, please allow me to summarise the facts instead.”

“Speak!”

‘Through indiscretion in the English Parliament, it has become known that Your Majesty’s proposal was first made to Austria. We owe it to Russia itself that the proposal was subsequently made known to Prussia. Immediately, the Liberal Party in Germany, the so-called National Association, convened in Heidelberg on 6 May to issue a declaration. This was repeated on 5 September. We saw the same thing in State Councillor Carteret’s speech at the Geneva Shooting Festival on 10 June and in the Flemish assemblies in Brussels. To put it bluntly – the Russian indiscretion has aroused mistrust everywhere. Hence the meeting of the German princes in Baden, the
[203]
Prince Regent and the King of Bavaria with the Emperor of Austria in Teplitz and Salzburg – the demonstrative toasts to the unity of Germany and the German great powers – the formation of volunteer corps in England and their parades in London and Edinburgh, demonstrations of Palmerston’s policy, which opposes any expansion of French power, having already viewed the annexation of Nice and Savoy very unfavourably, and

‘which is evidently playing a part in the events in Italy. Finally, in response to our pamphlet[1], Russia’s overt overtures towards Austria through the demonstration on Emperor Franz Joseph’s birthday and the new invitation to the meeting in Warsaw, the purpose of which is less to discuss the position of the old Alliance of 1813 towards Italy than against France!’

‘And the result of all this?’

“Is – that France is currently isolated, and it is not advisable to insist on our old rights without allies.”

“Marshal *Randon!*”

“Sire!”

“Tell this gentleman what army France commands apart from the occupation forces!”

“The Minister knows that we have the Guards under Count St Jean d’Angely, the Paris Corps, the Lille Corps under the Duke of Magenta, and the Nancy Corps under Marshal
[204]
Canrobert, the Corps of Lyon under the Duke of Magenta, the Corps of Nancy under Marshal d’Hilliers, the Corps of Tours under Marshal Niel, the Corps of Toulouse under Marshal Niel – that is a force of 600,000 men on a war footing, and we have 10,000 naval troops.”

‘Listen, Thouvenel. Today we have 600,000 men. If we give the Prince Regent of Prussia time, in five years’ time he will have an army equal to ours, and the best armed and organised in Europe. I know this man and I know what he will achieve if he is allowed his way!’

“Nevertheless, Sire, it is impossible. Consider the sacrifices of last year’s campaign!”

“You are a secret friend of the Prussians! But I tell you, France must control the Rhine border from Basel to where it flows into the sea if it is to be secure and maintain its position of power in Europe. Yet here comes Mocquart, hurrying after us. See what he brings, Marshal!”

The minister made use of the few moments they were alone. He took a step closer.

“Sire,” he said with deep gravity, “think carefully before you make a decision!
Do you see that boy over there?”

“My son?”

‘Yes, Sire! – It is not France that is at stake, but the Napoleonic dynasty.
There is but one way to preserve the throne for your son.”

‘What is it?’
[205]

“A firm and sincere alliance with Prussia! – But the Marshal is returning.”

Accompanied by *Mocquart*, the Emperor’s Chief of Staff, the Minister of War returned to his seat. Louis Napoleon’s confidant and favourite, who had just published his notorious play, was holding several papers in his hand.

“Dispatches?”

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[1] *‘La Syrie et l’alliance* russe’, published in Paris at the end of July and openly proclaiming the aforementioned proposals to Prussia.

"Yes, Sire – of great importance! The telegraph has just delivered them one after the other!"

"Well?"

"Our expedition in China has taken the Taku Forts at the mouth of the Peiho River alongside the English and is advancing on Peking! The artillery equipment found in the forts is evidently of Russian origin."

'The presence of the English is a poor accompaniment to the news of victory. The achievements of the French troops must be particularly emphasised in the *Moniteur*! – Go on!'

"Prince *Miloš* Obrenović has died in Belgrade. His son Michael has taken over the government."

"What is the name of the rival candidate?"

"Kara Georgievich! He left Paris immediately upon hearing the news yesterday!"

"We must quietly support his campaign so that Russia remains occupied in the Danubian principalities. But I see you are hesitating over the most important matter. What is it?"

"Sire – Ancona surrendered this morning. [206]
General Lamoricière and the entire garrison are prisoners of war."

The Emperor pressed his lips together and came to a halt, but said nothing for some time.
His three companions were also silent.

"This Cialdini has more luck than genius! A French officer of renown – it is a disaster that the general did not hold out longer."

'Sire,' said the Marshal grimly, 'France ought to have remembered sooner that Count Lamoricière was a French general!'

The Emperor did not reply to the harsh remark. Then he asked hastily: 'Does anyone already know of the news?'

"Sire – I know my duty!"

"Then keep silent – I must break the news to the Empress myself at the appropriate time. – Marshal, return to the villa at once and send a telegram to Castellane ordering two regiments of the Marseille Division to be embarked for Civitavecchia. Count Goyon will receive his instructions this very evening. – But – good heavens – what is happening there –"

The Emperor, already standing at the top of the ancient baths, had caught sight of the party ahead and was now hurrying down the steps with the vigour of a young man.

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The ladies' party had reached the ancient Roman baths,
[207]
the Empress's favourite spot, where she often spends hours at a time.

Everyone in Biarritz knows this to be the case, and at the time of the imperial court's walks, this spot is therefore naturally a sort of reserved area from which the rest of the company withdraws, contenting themselves with looking down from the height of the promenade onto the small amphitheatre that forms the site, and eavesdropping on every expression and every movement of this exclusive circle.

It was therefore all the more surprising when it was noticed that one of the most prominent spots in this semicircle was already occupied by a person who seemed to pay no heed either to the footmen—who were spreading out a few plaids and shawls whilst casting very haughty and sullen glances at the intruder—or to the approaching company.

The stranger had taken his seat at the tip of a protruding cliff, in the hollow of which the waves broke, foaming and hissing, close to the Empress's favourite spot and, in a sense, obstructing the view from it. Reaching the stranger's spot was not without danger, as it required a head for heights and a sure foot to reach him on the narrow rocky ledge, and that was probably also the reason why the servants did not remove him from his chosen spot. They did not dare to call out to him, as they are strictly forbidden to cause any offence or even to restrict the public's access.

We have already mentioned that the stranger took little
notice of their [208]
preparations, or indeed of other people, but seemed preoccupied solely with his own thoughts and reveries. He was a man whose appearance was well suited to attracting attention and capturing one's interest from the very first glance.

He wore, at least in part, the elegant and flattering Spanish costume mentioned earlier, which dandies on both sides of the Pyrenees make use of at these spas, that is to say, dainty, close-fitting boots of fine, glossy leather reaching to the knees with high heels, wide trousers of fine black cloth falling in pleats well above the knee, and a tunic similar to the old German attire depicted by painters.

But this was where the similarity in dress ended, and a certain air of romance was added which suggested a sailor.

For instead of the white, delicately pleated shirt, the coat, which was thrown back widely across his chest, revealed one made of the finest red wool, delicately embroidered with gold thread even on the short, folded-over collar, leaving his strong, muscular neck bare and fastened there by nothing more than a single large dark pearl, the sort that the divers of Espiritu Santo, at the entrance to the Gulf of California, sometimes wrestle from the depths of the sea whilst battling the ravenous teeth of the tintorera. Instead of the black, wide-brimmed barret that belonged to that costume, a red Greek fez sat upon the stranger's dark, curly hair, such as the sailors of the Aegean Sea wear,
[209]
with a long golden tassel that hung down to his shoulder.

That was what the court ladies' lorgnettes and opera glasses had immediately noticed. But none of them had yet seen the stranger's face, which was turned out to sea or down into the depths, whilst he sat on the cliff with his arms folded, lost in thought.

The tall woman, who had led the way in the company of the prelate and the boy, had not, until then, paid any attention to the unfamiliar figure whilst engaged in earnest conversation.

Only now, as she was about to take her usual seat and brushed the short *'da* Gloria' veil back over her barrette, did her gaze fall upon the stranger. She observed him for a few moments through her lorgnette and then turned back to her companion. This lady's peculiarly beautiful and delicate face was finely and narrowly chiselled; her firm lips and dark eyes bore a proud, almost haughty, resolute expression; blonde hair, shimmering with a reddish golden hue, framed her high forehead and formed a rare and all the more beautiful contrast to her dark Spanish eyes. Her dainty, slender figure was draped in that far-flaring framework of steel, whalebone and ribbon, which was designed as an invention for its beautiful wearer to travel round the world, and which might one day once again adorn the women and

daughters of the Fijian islanders

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or the beauties of New Zealand as their principal garment: the crinoline!

'You know, Monsignor,' said the lady in Spanish, 'how deeply I revere His Holiness, and how deeply I am saddened by the unfortunate events that have recently befallen the See of Peter. But what can I do? I have urged the Emperor daily on this matter – but his hands, too, are tied by the treaty, and all he can do is to reinforce the garrison in Rome. Rest assured that no enemy shall set foot on Roman soil.'

'And what of Umbria and the Marches? Is it not enough that the Papal States were stripped of their legations during the revolutions of 1859?'

'Let us place our hope in God and the saints that General Lamoricière will succeed in holding on to Ancona. The recall of our envoy from Turin will certainly have made an impression – the Emperor is not failing to issue exhortations to moderation, but the Court of St James is quite openly supporting the movement in Naples, and you cannot possibly expect the Emperor to come to the defence of the Bourbons."

'Good heavens, is he not their heir in France, and does not the throne of that country oblige the one who sits upon it—whether he be called a Bourbon or a Bonaparte—as the first son of the Holy Church to protect it? Believe me, Your Majesty, this is not a matter of the possession of a secular territory, but of the very existence of the Catholic Church, of its firm endurance against the

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insolent revolutionary ideas of modern times, which, like the iconoclasm of earlier days, lay their sacrilegious hands upon the altars, and which – once these have fallen – will, without hesitation, also overthrow the thrones that now, in blind complacency, stand by and watch the Church's downfall instead of forming a bulwark around her. What is the world to say when the *Correspondant* reports quite openly, without being disavowed, that Prince Napoleon and Princess Clotilde received Sterbini, Rossi's murderer, and his accomplices?'

'You know, Monsignor, that the dispute over the Church's temporal power is a very old one, and that even my husband's great-uncle, however strictly he upheld the dignity of the Church, held a different view on the matter!'

'Your Majesty knows the history of France too well,' said the prelate with a certain severity, 'not to recall what the consequences of that sacrilegious scheme

with the rights of the Holy Church. – The Holy Father places all his hope in Your Majesty, hitherto such a faithful daughter of the faith and a staunch pillar of the Catholic Church, and has charged me to reinforce with my words the letter which I had the honour of presenting to Your Majesty this morning. Is the reply I am to convey to him truly to be such a sad one? Is the Head of Catholic Christendom really to be forced to accept the refuge that Protestant England has offered him in Malta?'

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'I am deeply distressed by this, Monsignor, but public opinion in France . . . The Holy Father will find an asylum more befitting his dignity in France or Spain at any moment!'

A quick glance by the priest convinced him that the group had kept a sufficient distance not to overhear the conversation, and that the Emperor had only just reached the steps leading to the rotunda with the gentlemen in his entourage.

His sharp, gaunt face leaned forward slightly, closer to the beautiful, tall woman.

'Your Majesty and your mother, the Countess of Theba,' he said softly, 'used to take a stricter and more zealous view of this matter. May Your Majesty allow me to remind you of that evening in the Tuileries, when I had the good fortune to be the first to congratulate you and us on the victory.'

'Monsignor!'

The priest continued. 'His Holiness the Pope is your son's godfather. Does Your Majesty recall the fate of the unfortunate heir to the throne of the First Empire, and will you join the mother's prayers with those of the Church to the Blessed Virgin . . .'

A cry from the ladies interrupted him. – The noble lady, who had just been reminded of her son in such a manner, had risen and looked in alarm at the boy, who until then had been playing quietly with the pebbles at her side. She stood there, visibly pale beneath the rouge of her make-up, and stretched out her arms tremblingly.

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'Holy Madonna – my son!'

'The Prince! The Prince!' was the general cry, but no one had enough presence of mind or quickness to counter the danger that had caused this terror.

The boy, having slipped from the grasp of his illustrious mother and the direct supervision of his lady-in-waiting, had taken advantage of the moments when everyone's attention was focused on other matters to slip away unnoticed from the Empress's side. He had taken a few steps forward, and, lured by ordinary childish curiosity or perhaps by a stone glistening particularly brightly in the sunshine, he had stepped onto the narrow rocky ledge leading to the cliff, upon which the stranger was still sitting, keeping watch.

'Prince, come back! Over here!'

"Louis – good heavens!"

Either the imperial boy could not hear the warning cries over the sound of the waves, or he did not want to hear them, and he strode onwards. One false step could easily send him tumbling into the abyss, and it was just as dangerous to let him go any further as it was to cause him confusion and terror by rushing after him.

At that very moment, probably alerted to the scene behind him by the commotion amongst the crowd on the plateau, the stranger had risen to his feet.

A single glance revealed to him the cause of the terror that had paralysed all the members of high society; – without

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a moment's hesitation, he strode confidently and steadily along the narrow rocky ridge towards the boy, who looked at him curiously and kindly; he bent down to him, took him in his arms and carried him back to the land, where he set him down at the Empress's feet

The noble lady's first instinct was to press the child to her breast; the child, however, seemed completely unaware that he had caused any concern whatsoever and was greatly surprised that a stranger had taken the liberty of touching him in such an uninhibited manner. Her second reaction, however, even before she turned her eyes towards the stranger who stood amongst the distinguished company with an unassuming and confident demeanour, was to extend her hand to the prelate as she sank back into her seat in a state of great agitation.

'You were right to remind me, Monsignor, that only the saints can protect this child. Return to Rome without a care!'

She was just about to turn to the stranger when her husband hurried over, and the marshal's half-whispered cry of 'His Majesty the Emperor!' made the stranger realise the high company in which he found himself.

The boy, having wriggled free from his mother's arms, ran towards his father and clung to him.

The Emperor kissed him on the forehead, then wiped his own with his handkerchief.

'Calm yourself, Madame,' he said, 'you see, this carelessness has had no ill consequences. Take the boy with you, Colonel de Lamorte, and

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'You, Madam Admiral' – he addressed one of the ladies of the retinue who had earlier called out to the prince – albeit too late – 'have permission to return to Paris tomorrow morning.'

'But what's the matter, *dear Papa?*' asked the little boy, quite astonished.

'You were disobedient, Louis,' said the Emperor, 'you could have come to harm if this gentleman had not been so kind as to look after you better than the people to whom you were entrusted. – Sir, please accept my thanks and those of the Empress for your swift and resolute assistance. Are you French?'

'No, Sire!'

'I have not yet had the pleasure of noticing you amongst the bathers, nor of knowing you in any other way.'

"Sire, I only arrived here this morning." As he spoke, the stranger gestured towards the sea.

"At sea? – So you're a sailor?"

"I am the captain and owner of the yacht moored in the southern bay."

"An English yacht! I've been told as much. May I ask your name, sir?"

"I am not English, Sire, but Spanish, and my name is *Juan*, Count *of Lerida*."

“Lerida? The name is not unfamiliar to me, and it will be even less so to my wife.”
[216]

The Empress had risen and stepped up beside her husband; the ladies and gentlemen of the retinue formed a circle around the small group, and all eyes were fixed on the stranger.

His appearance was entirely suited to justifying the interest that his very first sight had already aroused, particularly amongst the ladies.

He was a man of about 26 to 28 years of age, not much above average height, but of that supple build with narrow hips and a broad chest which, despite the slender, elegant waist, betrayed a steely muscular strength. His small, almost feminine hands and feet betrayed his southern origins, as did his dark eyes, whilst the colour of his skin displayed a clarity and purity usually associated only with northern ancestry and frequently found amongst the true aristocracy of the Norman race.

The stranger’s head formed a beautiful oval, framed by an almost black, curly and well-groomed beard, whilst the full, red upper lip, due to the absence of a moustache and its distinctive curve—which revealed his gleaming white incisors with every movement—took on a peculiarly voluptuous expression. It was as though this mouth had been created to cling inextricably to the lips of a beautiful woman, and would not tolerate even the slightest obstacle to this union. Above this truly voluptuous mouth, rising from a broad, arched forehead, was a short but strong and beautifully shaped nose with wide, open nostrils, which gave the
[217]
face that bold and masculine expression which the drifting, dreamy quality of the large eye sometimes threatened to undermine. The expression of this eye was exceedingly changeable and seemed even to shift in colour from the soft blue of shame to a dark, consuming black. These were indeed eyes that held equal significance for men and women alike—haughty and defiant, yet at the same time imploring and consuming.

As the bold sailor’s gaze, with its shifting expression, swept across the circle that had formed around him, a murmur arose amongst the ladies—those uninhibited remarks which Parisian women are wont to claim as a prerogative of the cosmopolitan city.

The Empress, who is reluctant to be reminded of her Spanish family connections, whilst her husband loves to dwell on them, made an exception on this occasion.

‘The Lerida family, sir, is a lineage in Spain that is as ancient as it is numerous,’ she said. ‘I have known some of them myself.’

The stranger, who had apparently forgotten this until then, bared his head at this address.

‘My father,’ he said respectfully, ‘was a corregidor of Irun and later a captain under Zumala-Carréguy.’

“So from the Biscayan branch. But if I recall correctly, I believe I heard that this gentleman had no family at all and that the line had died out?”

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"My father was married to an Englishwoman who, for family reasons, returned to her homeland after only two years, Madame. I was brought up under the care of my uncle."

"His name?"

"The Viscount of Heresford, Sire."

"What," said the Emperor in astonishment, "Lord Heresford, an old acquaintance of mine? During my stay in England, I visited him at his magnificent country estate, Eglinton, and went hunting with him on his estates in Scotland."

"I had the honour of seeing Your Majesty as a page at the tournament my uncle organised."

"And – if I recall correctly – is my old friend dead?" remarked the Emperor, not without a certain hesitation.

"He was murdered in Paris on the day of Orsini's execution!"

"Quite right – it must have been around that time. I deeply regretted the misfortune and the loss; but the Marquis, your uncle, was somewhat eccentric in character and favoured strange company."

The young man remained silent.

'And you, Count,' the Emperor broke the silence that had fallen, 'may I ask what brings you here? A pleasure trip, or perhaps you wish to visit your relatives in Spain?'

'Forgive me, Sire, it is a business trip; I am a smuggler!' [219]

The entire circle of distinguished guests laughed, following the sovereign's example, at this peculiar confession.

'Well now, Count, then I advise you to be on your guard against my customs officers,' said the Emperor, playing along with the jest. 'French customs laws have, admittedly, been greatly relaxed in recent times, yet they remain rather strict, and I do not interfere with my own justice, even in the case of a smuggler of your sort, who has just done us such a great favour.'

'Forgive me, Sire, but I was entirely serious. I have an insurmountable inclination to smoke puros and Manillas in France instead of the government's cigars, to drink Bordeaux in England that has not been watered down by Her Majesty Queen Victoria's customs officers, and to wear French foulards in Spain that have not paid any duty.'

'I see, sir,' said the Emperor with a smile, 'you have inherited some of your late uncle's eccentricities, and, it would seem, the means to indulge your passions as well, which pleases me for your sake. Yet, whether you are a smuggler or a count, the Empress and I are deeply indebted to you, and we hope to be able to show you our favour during your stay in Biarritz!"

A friendly wave of the hand signalled to the stranger that the audience was over, and he withdrew. The Emperor took his wife's hand and led her up the steps; the court followed.

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The ardent gaze of the man left behind was fixed on the beautiful, graceful figures of the younger ladies as they ascended the embankment with the graceful stride of Parisian women, not without a coquettish glance back at the hero of the little scene, and in doing so met two brown eyes that looked down upon him with a certain aristocratic coolness.

It was the last of the ladies, a tall, slender figure with an aristocratic bearing. Her proud, refined face was as cold as ice, and yet that mysterious aura—which forms the connection between eyes like an electric ray—flashed in a sudden blush across her temple as her gaze met that of the stranger.

The lady turned away and slowly followed the procession, not without turning back once more at the top of the embankment. The Count's gaze followed her, and he did not look away until he was addressed.

'Monsieur,' said the cavalier, who had returned to the young man, 'I beg your permission to introduce myself as Count *Tascher de la Pagerie*, First Chamberlain to Her Majesty the Empress. I have been instructed to invite you to tea with Their Majesties this evening.'

The owner of the yacht bowed. "Her Majesty's command is my command, but – if you'll excuse me, I am not familiar with the customs of the French court – at what time am I to arrive?"

'Their Majesties take their tea at 9 o'clock [221]
on the villa's terrace. I shall have the honour of receiving you after 8 o'clock.'

The Spaniard or Englishman cast a glance at the sky and the sea. 'Allow me, Count, to detain you for just a moment longer. I find myself in no small quandary. We have a south-westerly wind and it is now 6 o'clock. It is impossible to reach my ship in under two hours and get dressed, as I went ashore without any idea of the honour that had been bestowed upon me and sent my boat back. Even in the greatest haste, I would not be able to arrive before ten o'clock in a barge from the harbour, unless . . . "

'Well, sir? – In this outfit, mind you, even though it is most excellently chosen and would make our lions burst with envy, it simply won't do. If only I knew how I could help us out of this predicament!'

"There is, in fact, a way."

"Well, *parbleu*, do tell!"

"The customs office's telegraph –"

The chamberlain burst into loud laughter, which the stranger joined in.

"My dear sir, you're not seriously expecting us to put the Imperial Customs Service at your disposal, are you?"

"There'll be no other option if you want me this evening," said the young man, still laughing.

"Well, I suppose with a smuggler of your sort [222]
we can certainly take the risk. And, as luck would have it, I see an officer from our customs service over there. Please, come this way, Lieutenant!"

The customs officer approached respectfully from among a group of onlookers.

“What do you wish, sir, or Don Lerida?”

“Simply that you allow me to send a few signals to my ship, so that my steward may bring my trunks ashore.”

The chamberlain turned to the customs officer. “This gentleman is a guest of His Majesty the Emperor. You have heard what he wishes, so please be so kind as to accompany him to the station and give the necessary instructions there.”

The officer bowed.

‘Now then, Mr Smuggler,’ said the Count cheerfully, ‘I certainly hope to have the pleasure of introducing you to our ladies at 8 o’clock.’

He held out his hand, which the Anglo-Spaniard held for a moment.

‘I am very much looking forward to it. If it is not too forward of me, Count, I would like to ask you now who the two younger ladies accompanying Her Majesty were.’

‘Which ones do you mean? – You know that everyone wants to appear as young as possible.’

“First of all, the lady in sea-green!”

‘Good heavens, you have excellent taste, my young friend! That is the Duchess of Rochambeau, the coldest

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and proudest beauty at court, and, what’s more, certainly not very well disposed towards you.”

‘Why is that?’

“Because your dexterity and your swift intervention on behalf of her relatives have drawn her sharp rebuke. She is the Prince’s Chief Lady-in-Waiting.”

‘*By Jove*, Count, it would certainly have been worse if the Hope of France had done a little somersault into the water,’ said the young man ironically.

“And the delicate, fair-haired lady in blue?”

“She is indeed the youngest – Mademoiselle von Kervague, a Breton, still a mere child. And now, *au revoir*, sir!”

The chamberlain hurried after the distinguished company, whom he caught up with halfway to the villa. The stranger gazed after them, deep in thought, from which he was roused only by the customs officer’s address.

‘If it pleases you, Monsieur, I am at your service.’

‘Ah, right! I apologise for keeping you waiting!’ A hint of mockery flashed in the corners of the speaker’s eyes as he took a closer look at the officer, who was an even younger man than himself, with an open, weather-tanned face. ‘Let us be on our way, then!’

The two set off along the bank towards the hilltop, from which one could see both inlets

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‘So you wish to send signals to the English yacht moored on the Spanish side?’ asked the officer.

“Yes, sir! – I have, unfortunately, sent my boat back and require a few suitcases to present myself appropriately at court.”

‘But will your people on the yacht understand our signals?’

“I shall give you my private signals, for which I am always prepared whenever I leave my ship.”

‘So the yacht is yours, my lord?’

‘I am both owner and captain of the *Victory*,’ said the stranger, without rejecting the title the other man had bestowed upon him. ‘She is an excellent sailor!’

‘So it seems – we observed her yesterday evening as she arrived in the roadstead. I must surely have had the honour of seeing Your Lordship’s face on some previous occasion?’

“I doubt it,” said the stranger, who was now speaking his French with a strong English accent. “This is the first time I’ve sailed my ship into this harbour, and I’ve come straight from Cork.”

“So that old fool, Cocles, was mistaken when he claimed he knew the yacht and had seen it many times.”

‘Bah,’ said the captain, ‘the yachts of the yacht club are very similar; they’re mostly all built at the same shipyards. Whether this is the case with the Victory, I don’t know
[225]
, I actually do not know; I inherited it two years ago on the death of my uncle, the Lord Viscount of Heresford.”

The officer remained silent in the face of these facts.

“Have you been at this post for long, Lieutenant?” asked the Englishman as they walked on.

“For a year, sir.”

‘And is your service very strict and arduous?’

“From time to time – depending on whether the Spanish government is stable or in turmoil.”

“*Good heavens!* I don’t quite understand that. What do the Cortes and the Spanish government have to do with the duties of a French customs officer?”

The young official laughed. “I can see, my lord, that you have not yet been to our coast. The matter is very simple. Before and after every attempt at rebellion – *pro-nunciamento*, as the Spaniards say – both the Spanish and the French smugglers are exceptionally busy and therefore all the more brazen and daring. General Prim is a veritable curse for us, and during the Bourbons’ last attempt –”

‘Ah – that was in April, when General Ortega was shot dead at Tortega and the Count of Montemolin behaved rather pitifully.’

“I’ve heard of that,” said the young officer indifferently. “But the Count of Montemolin has caused us less trouble than that devil Juan el Tuerto!”
[226]

“El Tuerto? – Who’s that? I’ve never heard the name before.”

‘This, my lord, is the name of the boldest and most skilful smuggler, brigand and conspirator who, for a long time now, has been plaguing the passes of the Pyrenees, the coasts of Asturias and Biscay, and the throne of Her Majesty Queen Isabella.’

‘And does this scoundrel and revolutionary not even respect the French guards?’

‘We have every reason to believe that this spring he personally led various daring raids by the smugglers and skirmishes in which they engaged us, and in which – as I must confess to my shame as a Frenchman – we came off worse.

One thing is certain: that accursed old man is held in the highest regard by smugglers of both French and Spanish nationality."

"You said 'the old man'," remarked the yacht's owner. "So he's already an old bandit with a long criminal career behind him?"

'He may be fifty years old; he is ugly and one-eyed, hence his name. Yet he must have previously practised his trade on another coast or inland, for his reputation in this region is scarcely more than two years old. Perhaps he is also an escaped galley slave from Brest or Toulon. We have often encountered such men along these borders—appearing suddenly and, just as quickly, vanishing due to a lucky bullet, a rival's dagger thrust, or a fortune they have amassed
[227]
by a lucky bullet, a rival's dagger thrust or a fortune amassed – and I myself recall a couple of them from when I was still in the land service on the Pyrenean passes and the Savoy border – and indeed, My Lord, it was there that I saw someone who bore a striking resemblance to you, except that he wore a different beard.'

'I have never been to Nice or Savoy.'

"And I am glad that I was mistaken, My Lord, for the scene I witnessed, in which your double played a wicked part, cost a beautiful young girl her life."

By the time he had spoken these words, they had reached the observatory, and the Englishman was thus prevented from hearing the details of the incident.

Sitting on the bench was one of the two customs officers on duty, a man of about forty with an open, honest face and a tall, sturdy build, whilst his companion, a weather-beaten old sailor with a wooden leg, was crouching in front of the telescope, peering intently at an object.

'The devil take my wooden leg as a hand-spoke if that bloke isn't becoming more and more suspicious to me,' grumbled the old man. 'It's the second time today he's been swapping boats with that damned smuggler, and a lad who does that isn't much better himself and has no reputation.'

'But on both occasions they were feluccas, *Cocles*,' said the customs officer in front of the little hut, replying to his companion through the open window. 'We
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don't even know for certain ourselves whether the ship out there is the Spanish smuggler or not, and the yacht of all things can't possibly suspect anything just because a foreign ship sends a boat over to her side. There could be a hundred perfectly innocent reasons for it – perhaps someone has fallen ill and they're asking for medicine, or they're offering fish, or –"

'Or oranges from Pamplona,' said the Englishman with a laugh, as he stepped round the corner of the house with his companion, where they had overheard the conversation.

The customs officer had stood up at the sight of his superior and saluted respectfully. "The Lieutenant, Cocles!" he called out in a low voice.

"Good afternoon, *Lafarre*," said the officer. "What's new?"

“Not much, Lieutenant, except that Cocles is becoming ever more adamant in his claim that the felucca, which has been lying off the coast since this morning and has returned our signal with the French flag, is nothing less than a ship from Bordeaux or Nantes, but rather our old acquaintance, the ‘San Martino’.”[“]

‘I’ll have myself keelhauled if it isn’t!’ cried the veteran, who had meanwhile stepped into the doorway. “If that scoundrel thinks he can fool an old sea dog from Brest with the trickery of a fresh coat of paint and a modified jibboom, he deserves to be flogged ten times along the backstay. It is as certain that it is the San Martino as it is that the damned English greenhorn over there
[229]
has already crossed the bay more than once with ill intent.”

“The ship you’re talking about, old man,” interrupted the Englishman, “is certainly no French vessel, judging by the cut of its sails and the rather dilapidated state of its rigging.”

The old sailor stared at the speaker in astonishment. ‘What do you know about it?’ he asked gruffly, taking the stranger for one of the usual bathers who so frequently visit this spot and pester the attendants with their questions and remarks.

‘*Goddam*, I think I can judge a bit more reliably,’ said the Englishman, ‘because I had that vessel three miles closer to my telescope this morning than you did, and my telescope is a genuine Dolbond, whereas this—’ he had stepped up to the tube *without hesitation* through the open door and was examining the two ships—‘is a very mediocre piece of kit. The felucca seems to me to have come from Oporto and to have been laden with wine or tropical fruits, and the lads have probably offered some of it to my steward and the crew.’

The old Stelzfuß looked at the stranger with even greater astonishment.

‘This gentleman,’ said the officer, ‘is the owner of the yacht, and, it seems, a seaman like you, Cocles, which I, unfortunately, am not. That is why I must rely on your judgement regarding that ship, all the more so as My Lord also confirms your view. Give [230]
therefore give the signal, Lafarre, that our sentries along the entire southern coast are to maintain strict vigilance tonight, and then I ask you to transmit My Lord’s orders to his yacht by telegraph. In the service of the Emperor! As I heard on the shore, this gentleman may have saved France from a great calamity.”

He bowed to the stranger. “Do you have any further instructions, My Lord? – Otherwise, I hope you will allow me to attend to my duties, which this evening and tonight are likely to be rather demanding.”

‘Just one more thing – where can my boat moor?’

‘Wherever you wish, My Lord – I shall give orders that you are not disturbed in any way.’

‘My heartfelt thanks, sir; I shall not fail to commend your kindness to the Earl.’

The young official blushed with delight at this promise and was just about to leave when another thought seemed to occur to him.

"Did you notice anything else about the vessel, Cocles, that you claim to have seen passing by offshore yesterday, even though none of us could make out more than the tips of a few sails through our telescopes?"

'*Good heavens* – it's still there, to the south-west, but it must be so far away that one can see no more of it than the wing of a seagull.'

The customs officer took his leave, once again showing the utmost courtesy and helpfulness towards the stranger to the chief supervisor, who had accompanied him a few steps
[231]
, as the latter seemed to be enjoying the special attention of the imperial lords.

When the guard Lafarre returned to the station, he found the stranger engaged in conversation with Cocles, who replied to him like a growling bulldog, for, like all Bretons, he hated the English with a passion. The supposed lord sat at the telescope, watching his ship.

'Sir,' said the overseer, 'how do you propose we make contact with the yacht?'

'Nothing could be easier, my dear fellow. I see that your signal to the coastguards has already been noticed. Master Wilmsen, my helmsman, is on deck and will spot my private flag at once, if you would be so kind as to hoist it.' As he spoke, he took a small, tightly tied parcel from his breast pocket, untied the string and produced a number of small silk flags and pennants ribbons in every colour, which he immediately began to arrange.

'Here, take these, Monsieur, and let them fly for a minute. I'll bet ten pounds that the reply will be here before then.'

He handed the guard a small flag, chequered in green and white, which in the very next moment was hoisted up the flagpole of the signal mast and fluttered merrily in the sea breeze.

'You see, Monsieur,' said the stranger, 'there's
[232]
the answer right there. The same flag on the gaff of the mizzenmast."

Indeed, even with the naked eye, one could see that a flag had been hoisted on board the yacht.

'Well, my friend,' continued the owner of the vessel, 'take this red and white ribbon and hoist it. It is the signal to send me boats.'

'You mean the boat, my lord?'

"No, I am ordering two of them, for one may wait for me on the beach until the soirée with your Emperor is over, whilst the other returns to the yacht in case I should still have some arrangements to make. – Ah, they have understood me and are already casting off the gig and the large boat! Now, Monsieur, please hoist these two flags; it is the private signal that I require my steward and my suitcases."

The flags were hoisted in an instant. A wisp of smoke rose from the yacht's aft deck, and immediately afterwards the faint echo of a bang from

those small guns which vessels intended purely for pleasure cruises usually carry.

‘*By Jove*,’ said the Englishman, ‘you can see that my orders have been understood! – Just a moment, my dear fellow,’ he continued, addressing Cocles, who, muttering curses under his breath at the English insolence that was so brazenly encroaching upon a French station, had for some time now

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had been bustling about him, evidently endeavouring to get hold of the telescope. – ‘You are to take my place immediately, now that I am satisfied that the correct trunks have been selected.’

It took a few minutes before this seemed to have been done, and only when the two boats pushed off from the side of the night did the stranger put down the telescope.

‘They’ll be on shore in an hour and a half,’ he said, ‘it’s time for me to find some lodgings, as the Hôtel Gardère is fully booked from the roof to the cellar. And so, farewell, gentlemen, and many thanks for your kindness. I hope you won’t refuse to drink a bottle of wine to my health and to the continuation of our acquaintance, for I intend to visit this place more often whilst I am here.’

He had placed a sovereign on the corner of the table, gave the old Stelzbein a familiar nod – the same mocking smile flitting across his lips once more – and walked slowly down the footpath, heading towards the square in front of the church, where several smaller hotels are situated.

The onlookers saw him enter two of them and come out again after a brief conversation with the landlord or the head waiter, as though he had not been satisfied with the outcome of his enquiries.

When he came out for the second time, a little girl of about eight years old stepped in his path and spoke to him, as the young and old onlookers who had gathered

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had immediately crowded round, in the Basque-French patois of the border:

‘Are you perhaps looking for lodgings, Monsieur?’

He clearly did not understand her and asked what she wanted.

‘Excuse me, Monsieur,’ said one of the bystanders, ‘the little girl is asking whether you might be looking for accommodation?’

“*Damn it* – of course I’m looking for accommodation for two or three days – but the hotels in this town are all fully booked right up to the rafters, and I’ve already enquired at four of them to no avail, even offering double the price. Ask the girl if I can have two rooms for a few days?”

‘Yes, Monsieur, two lovely rooms with a view of the sea.’

‘And where?’

“At Mademoiselle Margaritta *Labeule’s!*”[“]

The name the little girl had mentioned seemed to cause quite a stir amongst the onlookers, at least amongst those who were from the town itself.

“At Margaritta Labeule’s, the daughter of the customs inspector who was shot eighteen months ago? But she’s never let out rooms before and has always refused to make her house available to holidaymakers!”

"Perhaps she's come to her senses and seen reason," said others. "Money is a fine thing, and the pension the government gives her is meagre. She must have lived very frugally in her seclusion." [235]

'They say the new lieutenant is courting her and wants to marry her.'

'Come now, Mathurin – Mademoiselle Magaritta has already turned down quite different suitors, for example the wealthy Padrillo, who owns no fewer than three vineyards. At her father's coffin, she vowed eternal chastity to the Blessed Virgin if she would help her avenge the Inspector's death on his murderers!'

"Bah," said a young man in the light but picturesque costume of the coastal fishermen, "they weren't murderers! He was shot in an honourable fight with the contrabandist."

The stranger put an end to all this chatter, to which he had apparently paid no heed, by turning to the little girl. "*Very well,*" he said, "I'll take the rooms, whatever they may cost. So lead the way!"

The idle crowd accompanied the pair for a short distance, then dispersed. The little girl led the way, and the yacht's owner followed her. –

On the cliff face of the southern bay, rising almost vertically from the waves to a height of some 150 feet, stands a row of detached houses, which are usually let as accommodation to the Spanish gentry who visit the spas of Biarritz and who, from these eagles' nests, have the raging sea at their feet and the coast of their homeland before their eyes.

Two narrow rocky paths lead down to those parts [236] of the narrow beach that can be crossed at low tide, for even then the ocean roars as it plunges over long stretches into the crevices and gorges of the cliff face, which it has been trying to hollow out for millennia.

The child led the stranger to one of the outermost houses in this Spanish colony. The house was small and two-storeyed, built entirely of stone, with an open veranda on the ground floor and a gallery above it on the second floor facing the water. A wall separated it from the road at the front, to which one descended via a few steps. The courtyard or garden, some twenty paces wide, formed by this passage between the wall and the house was completely desolate, although it still bore traces that a careful hand had, at least in the past, waged a diligent battle against the harsh sea winds, which, at this altitude, allow little to grow despite the scorching southern sun.

The child opened the door in the wall and walked towards the house, whilst the stranger followed her solemnly and in silence. Instead of opening the door, the little girl led the tenant to the wooden staircase which, as is customary in buildings of this type, ran along the narrow outer side of the house up to the gallery on the second floor and to the rooms situated there.

'Go upstairs, Monsieur,' said the child, 'and have a look at the flat; it is ready for you.' With that, she disappeared into the ground floor, whose hallway, as usual, led to the kitchen, that is to say [237]

two-thirds of the entire space and served as the inhabitants' living quarters.

Incidentally, the owner of the yacht seemed well acquainted with local customs, for he climbed the stairs without hesitation, stepped out onto the open, balcony-like gallery and, after casting one last glance at the sea, the two ships lying about a mile apart, and the yacht's two boats rowing towards the shore, he entered the room through the balcony door with a firm stride and an expectant look.

Quite contrary to the custom in almost all such houses, the room was furnished in the most comfortable, indeed almost opulent, manner; yet everything had a certain motley arrangement, lacking in style and harmony.

The walls were hung with precious Turkish silk wallpaper; although the gold embroidery was not new, it still made a magnificent and splendid impression. Hanging on the wall were several valuable, deeply darkened paintings from the Spanish school, interspersed with oriental and modern weapons. A fine straw mat covered the stone floor tiles, and whilst a low divan with broad cushions ran along one wall, on the opposite wall stood a magnificent sofa of gilded wood in the Rococo style, upholstered in heavy, brightly coloured floral silk damask. A pair of identical, uncomfortable chairs, an American rocking chair of curved wood, and in the corner a poor-quality, colourful plaster statue of the Virgin Mary on a precious bronze console table, adorned with wilted flowers, gold leaf and shells
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, together with a pair of tables—also differing in style and wood, and covered with a hundred and one things—completed the furnishings of the rather large drawing room, which, apart from the door leading to the veranda, had two other entrances: one opposite it, the second to the side of the sofa, leading to a small room that served as a bedroom.

Both entrances were closed off by heavy, dark velvet curtains instead of doors.

When the captain of the yacht entered the saloon, his gaze immediately fell upon the entrance opposite him.

At that very moment, the curtain covering it was drawn back, and a woman's figure appeared in the dark doorway.

She was a dainty, slender figure with broad hips and a full, elegant bust, as is often the case with women from the Iberian Peninsula. She was dressed in a short black silk dress that revealed her dainty ankles and feet in Saffian slippers. The rebozo, embroidered with metallic thread and adorned with precious Brussels lace, held together in one hand, half-concealed her pale face; from it, only her black, sparkling eyes flashed like two sharp dagger points through the veil, whilst her other small, slender hand, having lifted the curtain, remained pressed firmly and heavily against her heart.

'Margaritta!'

The stranger leapt down onto his [239]
, seized her delicate little hand and, despite her resistance, pressed it to his lips.

'Señor Don Juan, what are you doing?' – cried the lady in an agitated, resonant voice – 'Get away from me – let go of my hand; you know what separates us forever!'

Instead of letting go of her hand, he had wrapped his arm around her slender waist and drew her irresistibly towards him.

‘Nonsense, *mi cara*,’ he said in the finest Spanish. ‘It is high time your foolish anger came to an end. What can your faithful and long-banished lover do about the trajectory of a bullet that happened to strike the honourable Señor, your father, who, admittedly, could have done better than to ambush his old friends with those scoundrels of customs officers without the slightest warning? You know that I was present at that misfortune only by chance, and that the only reason I could not return to you was because we were all forced to flee out to the high seas.’

‘I know it was that vile bandit, El Tuerto, who shot my father,’ she said, ‘because he claimed he had intended to betray the Contrabandista Society. I have sworn to take my revenge on him, and I shall keep my oath!’

“Through Señor Lafarre?”

“No,” she replied, “you know I would never entrust my revenge to a customs officer! But – and this was where I was so bitterly mistaken – I was counting on the one to whom I owe more than my life

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, on him who abandoned me so shamefully and treacherously in my misfortune!”

“Treacherous, Margaritta? Who tells you that?” He had risen and drawn her – though she offered only feeble resistance – towards him onto the divan. ‘Who tells you that Juan has not constantly carried your image in his heart, even though he had to let so much time pass without seeing you again! Can you judge the countless obstacles that often stand in the way of a man who must make his way through life, even when it comes to his dearest wishes?’

‘But why, then, didn’t you at least send me a message during all that time? I’ve been told that you took part in the Contrebandista’s expeditions along this coast during the spring!’

“And who told you that?”

“Miguel, the porter!”

“He must have been mistaken, or been misled himself,” replied the sailor, as a dark flash shot from his eyes. “My ship is returning to Biarritz Bay for the first time in two years, only—”

She looked at him questioningly.

“It’s just that Juan Waterford is no longer the helmsman, but the captain of the ship, which is now called the ‘Victory’, whereas it used to be called the ‘Schwalbe’.”

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She threw her arms round his neck: ‘And do you still love me?’

“Have you ever doubted it? Shall I swear to you by the Madonna?”

‘Oh, come now – you don’t believe in the Mother of Mercy, you’re a heretic!’

“Very well, then, on a sailor’s word, and as proof, I myself will challenge that bandit El Tuerto to a duel at the first opportunity, even though . . .”

‘Never! O Holy Virgin, that monster would kill you, just as he murdered my father, and you must live for Margaritta and—’

She buried her blushing face against his chest. He lifted it gently and pressed his lips to hers in a long, consuming kiss. At last she wriggled free from his arms and pulled him up from the divan.

“Come, Juan!”

He looked at her with a fiery, questioning gaze as she pulled him towards the curtain of the cabinet.

“Yes, Juan, you must live for Margaritta and – this one here!”

She had quickly thrown back the velvet cover, and his astonished gaze fell upon a hammock hanging from the ceiling, in which a beautiful little boy of just over a year old lay sleeping on a small mattress.

Her eyes, which had at first been so dark and menacing, now rested on her lover’s face with an expression of overwhelming happiness, yet also of fear and uncertainty.
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He looked in astonishment at the sailor’s cradle and then at the young woman.

‘What – this child?’

“It’s ours, Juan!”

The happy father did not seem particularly thrilled by this lively surprise. He rubbed his forehead with his hand and looked somewhat sheepishly at the sleeping child. “But Margaritta – I had no idea, and nobody said a word to me about you becoming a mother!”

“Who would have, since you were away, as you yourself just told me! Could you have believed that my mother’s daughter would have been able to bear walking about before these people’s eyes as a woman of ill repute? Not a soul in this village suspects that I am a mother and that, through a thousand pains and sufferings, I waited for the day that would bring this boy’s father back to him.”

The young woman’s heroic self-sacrifice seemed, after all, to move his heart. He ran his hand once more over his forehead and eyes, as if to wipe away an unpleasant dream, and reached out his other hand to her across the boy, who had just opened his eyes and begun to weep softly when he saw the stranger beside him. ‘Forgive me, beloved of my soul,’ he said, ‘that the surprise left me speechless. Poor thing, what you must have suffered, left entirely to your own devices. I admire the strength of your character!’

At first, her gaze had remained fixed upon him [243]
as he appeared so very different from how her fervent imagination might have pictured this moment during many a lonely hour. But a woman’s heart that loves is so easily comforted and so full of hope. She took the boy from the mat, lifted him to his father’s lips, and then drew him back onto the divan.

‘Look, Juan, how much he resembles you,’ she said, “Your dark hair and that eye, whose gleam won my heart for you at first sight, when you first climbed up to us from the cave in the rock with the smugglers, and then stayed here secretly in this chamber for three days after your conversation with my father, until your ship returned from the Spanish coast.”

‘But how did you go about hiding your—’ he wanted to use a different word, but changed his mind — ‘your secret from the whole world?’

“The misfortune that befell me turned out to be a blessing in another respect. I had hardly the faintest inkling of it when you last took your leave of us, but I believe my father knew of our relationship!”

He looked at her intently.

‘You know, my beloved, that ever since my mother’s early death, my father has spoilt me, for he could never refuse me any of my whims, and even the secret of the Contrebandista had to be revealed to me. My mother’s Basque blood flows through my veins and rebels against these tyrannical laws! How often

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have I, from this very room—which my father and the gifts of the smugglers have adorned more beautifully than even a duchess’s palace could be!—lay in wait for the arrival of the San Martino and other ships, or has the lamp on my balcony signalled to the boatmen in the night, whilst my father led the officials in a different direction.’

“I know, I know,” said the captain of the yacht impatiently. “But you were saying that your father knew about our relationship . . .”

‘He’d often been dropping hints and warning me of late! He was becoming more morose and sullen with every passing day, and spoke of having to sever his ties with society. Often I didn’t understand his words and hints – including those about you – and merely realised that he was beginning to harbour a deep grudge against all of you, and particularly against El Tuerto. – Then, on that dreadful night, the tragedy struck – I had seen the flashes of gunfire from the gallery, exchanged along the coast – my only comfort was that I knew you were far away. But when the customs officers then brought my father into the house, bleeding, dying, with a bullet piercing his chest, I sank down in despair by his bedside and tore at my hair, for you were far away and I was now all alone!’

‘And did your father not tell you how it came about that he met his death at the hands of his old friends?’

‘No, my beloved, I learnt only from the officials

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that, under my father’s command, they had ambushed three of our friends’ boats as they were about to land at the *Rocher de Cancale*, and that a fight had broken out. My father had probably had neither the time nor the opportunity to call off the signal, or to warn our secret friends in any other way. To avoid arousing suspicion, he was at the forefront of the battle and the first to fall! The contrabandiers lost the cargo of two boats and three men, as they themselves later told me.”

“But what about your father?”

“He died half an hour after they brought him back. A single word still passed his lips as he clutched my hand convulsively in his own and fixed his eyes on me with an expression I shall never forget. Holy Virgin, it was dreadful, and I thought I would have to die with him. The effort he had made to speak had exhausted his last reserves of strength, and a stream of blood flowed from his mouth, with which his soul departed, even before the priest arrived to grant him absolution.”

‘And those words? Did you understand them?’

“Yes – a name!”

“Speak!”

“El Tuerto! – he is – the dying man wanted to say: my murderer! – but he no longer had the strength to do so! But when I awoke again at the side of the dead man, I laid my hand on his wound and vowed to avenge his murder. And the Blessed Virgin

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will stand by me in this, for she has given me a sign to remind me of my oath!”

‘What do you mean?’

The young woman pushed back the shirt of the boy lying in her lap with her hand and showed the man a small blood-coloured mark, situated in exactly the same place on the child as where the father had received the fatal wound from his mother.

‘Look, Juan, it is the sacred reminder that my father has sent us even from beyond the grave! Curse the murderer!’

A slight tremor made the man’s lip quiver at the young woman’s passionate curse and the sight of the mark, but he quickly overcame this weakness.

‘I have already told you that your father’s death occurred in honourable combat,’ he said grimly, ‘and so cannot be called murder. Moreover, there is a rumour circulating amongst the contrabandists that he himself instigated that raid by the customs officers, rather than preventing it!’

“Ha—I know he’s accused of that, but he’s lying like a scoundrel who wants to accuse him of treason!”

“There could be another reason! But go on, Margaritta!”

“The following night, as I lay alone keeping vigil over my father’s body, there was a knock at the door. Two men wrapped in cloaks entered, of whom I could only

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knew one of them. It was Miguel, the smuggler, and he told me that we had to obey his companion on pain of death. Indeed, the latter gave me the word to which we had all sworn to obey. Then I had to hand over all my father’s papers to him, which he went through in this room whilst Miguel and I remained with the dead man. When he then called me over, he too said that my father had deserved his fate, but that the company would look after me and that I should declare whether I wished to sell this house to them or remain living here. You know, Juan, that it is my mother’s inheritance; but even if it had not been so, how could I have parted with the place where I had to wait for you!’

‘And you stayed?’

“I repeated the oath my father had already taken from me back when I first descended into the rock cellars. Since then, I have had little to do with the men. They come and go, whilst I remained up here, longing for your arrival.”

“But what of the child?”

‘I soon realised that I was to become a mother. The solitary life I led, interrupted only rarely by a visit from my father’s former subordinates, allowed me to conceal my condition. Only my old nurse knew of it, and it was she who stood by me in my hour of need. The child who is with me to serve me is hers
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granddaughter, the orphan of a smuggler from the Pyrenees, and despite her youth, full of wisdom and discretion.”

‘Indeed, she knew exactly where to find me. And did you recognise my signal straight away?’

‘I saw it fluttering from the mast last night when the yacht—which was at first unfamiliar to me—dropped anchor. Only then did I realise you were nearby! But I waited in vain for you all night, even though I kept the light burning to signal that it was safe for you to come ashore.’

“You’ve forgotten, *mi cara*, that your father is no longer Inspector of the Customs and can no longer keep them out of our way. This Lieutenant Dalbond is a young man and, it seems, a very active and vigilant one, for I’ve heard that this spring he seized my old comrade’s goods on two occasions. We’ll have to pay him a hefty sum of doubloons.”

“He’s incorruptible!” said the girl quickly.

“Come now*!* We’ll see about that! But you seem to know his character very well indeed! If he has no taste for gold, we’ll have to see to it that he’s transferred. He really does have too keen an eye and too good a memory. We have some connections in Paris who’ll easily arrange that. But now listen to me, Margaritta, I have something to tell you.”

She looked at him questioningly.

“Did you notice the ship further out in the roadstead?” [249]

“The felucca flying the French flag?”

“Yes!”

“It bears some resemblance to the San Martino. But alas, it is not the same ship! Ha – if that bandit ever shows his face on this coast again, by the Holy Virgin, I’ll lead him to his doom!”

“Nonsense – the felucca is an honest vessel from Nantes, loaded with Spanish tobacco.
Did you also notice that I only went ashore this morning?”

“I haven’t taken my eyes off the yacht for a moment! But you’ve been on shore for hours – why didn’t you come to me? Why did you keep me in such agonising suspense for so long? I couldn’t bear it any longer; I had to send Louison to look for you.”

‘That was very foolish of you and could have had unpleasant consequences if the girl hadn’t behaved so sensibly.’

“But you must have known that I was consumed by longing! Why didn’t you come?”

‘Because, just as my ship has taken on a different appearance and a different name, so have I.’

‘What do you mean by that?’

"*Good heavens!* Simply that it is not the helmsman Juan or James Waterford standing before you, but Count Don Juan da Lerida, who in an hour's time will be taking tea with Their Majesties, the Emperor and Empress of France, at Villa Eugénie."

She turned away from him, offended. 'May the Blessed Virgin forgive you for your mockery. You were just now
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just as frivolous as you were before, whilst this misfortune has made me serious and sad."

He had risen and stepped to the veranda door, from where his gaze swept across the sea.

'Margaritta, my sweet *muchácha*,' he said with a laugh, 'it is no joke, but a matter of fact, and if you were to lend your pretty ear a little to the gossip of the ladies of Biarritz, you might hear from a hundred tongues at this very moment that the aforementioned Count Lerida, your obedient sweetheart, saved the Bonaparte dynasty from collapse barely two hours ago and is the man of the hour this evening. I therefore believe I have a certain claim on the person of the heir to the French throne, and I shall begin by collecting my thanks by smuggling a few trunks of genuine puros, Manilla tobacco and Saffian leather into French territory with the assistance of the sharp-eyed customs officers, without making use of the *'passage d'enfer'* for the purpose. Look, there come my boats round the Madonna's rock, and it is time for me to signal to them where to land and to supervise their landing.'

"What – you want to leave me?"

"For half an hour, my little dove, to have my trunks brought over here. I'll explain the rest to you later. Above all, keep your eyes open and your lips sealed, whatever you may hear or see, and don't forget that to anyone who's curious, I'm the Count of Lerida, your lodger, and here in Biarritz for the very first time!"
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He had pressed a kiss upon her lips, taken his cap and left the drawing room before she could even manage a reply or attempt to hold him back. Sad and resentful, she watched him go, pressed the child to her breast and, sighing, raised her eyes to the image of the Madonna in the corner of the room. 'Holy Mother of Sorrows,' she lamented, 'how little men understand true love! O Madonna, grant that his heart may always belong to me – it would be terrible if I were ever to have to doubt him! For me – and – for him!' At this thought, a menacing, passionate gleam flashed from her eyes, which only a moment before had been so gentle and imploring.

She was interrupted by a soft knock at the inner door.

She quickly placed the child in his hammock, drew the curtain across the alcove, and only then asked: 'Who's there?'

'Louison, Señorita!'

She opened the door. "What do you want, child?"

'Miguel, the porter, is downstairs. He wants to see you and says he has something to discuss with you.'

She paused to think for a moment. 'What if I were to use him to keep an eye on him?' she murmured softly. 'I know he's loyal to me! – But no – why be suspicious?! – Let him come in, Louison, I'll speak to him here!'

As the little girl walked away, the Señora stepped up to the door of the study, pressed a spring, and behind the curtain one could hear a heavy wooden shutter rolling down, sealing off the entrance hermetically.
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Then she sat down on the sofa.

Louison opened the door. “Come in, Monsieur Miguel.”

The athletic figure of a man of about thirty to thirty-five, dressed in the garb of a coastal fisherman, with a baskina on his tousled curly hair, shuffled into the room with clumsy movements and made a sort of bow.

Contrary to the intelligent, energetic features typical of these mountain and coastal dwellers, there was something clumsy and dull about the man—not only in his whole demeanour but also in his face; nature seemed to have compensated for his limited intellectual gifts with immense physical strength. Yet there was no stupidity or meanness in his features, but rather a certain good-naturedness and dog-like loyalty.

‘Praise be to Jesus Christ!’ he said humbly.

‘For ever and ever, Amen!’

‘I’m delighted to see you looking well, Mademoiselle,’ said the porter, whose enormous shoulders seemed made for his trade, as he twirled the baskina shyly between his fingers.

‘Thank you, Miguel,’ replied the lady of the house with a smile, ‘and I know it comes from the heart. But surely you have something else on your mind?’

The porter looked around cautiously to see if anyone was eavesdropping. Then he leaned forward and
[253]
whispered: ‘Something’s going to happen tonight, Mademoiselle!’

“I thought as much. But you know, Miguel, that I don’t concern myself with it, except to put out the signal light when required!”

“Yes, but – he’s here!”

“Who?”

“The one-eyed man, Mademoiselle! The one who shot your father.”

She sprang up as if bitten by a viper and lunged at him.

“Good heavens, what are you saying? El Tuerto is on that ship and he’s going to lead the expedition?”

“I’m certain of it, Mademoiselle! We’ve already received orders this morning to stand by.”

“But that’s impossible! Juan must know about it! Or could he have deliberately kept it from me?!”

“I don’t understand, Mademoiselle, who are you talking about?”

“You assured me before,” she said, not without some embarrassment, “that the young Englishman, the helmsman of the *Schwalbe*, who lived in this room a year and a half ago whilst wounded, right up until shortly before the terrible disaster, had taken part in the Spanish smugglers’ expeditions this spring?”

‘I told you so!’ replied the giant gruffly.

‘You were mistaken. Monsieur Waterford has not been to our coast – but he has been here since yesterday and told me so himself.’

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The porter stared at her with eyes wide open. His face, tanned by sun and weather, seemed to turn even redder.

“Who is here, Mademoiselle?”

“I told you – Monsieur Waterford, the former helmsman, now the captain of the yacht anchored out there in the roadstead.”

“And he’s with you?”

“He’s staying in this room again and left it barely half an hour ago. I’m surprised you haven’t seen him, given that he’s been on the coast since this afternoon.” The giant shook his head grimly.

“I haven’t seen him,” he said; “but if that madman is here, you can be all the more certain that El Tuerto is nearby too!

Do you remember that was the case back then – in March of last year!

The girl’s eyes sparkled like those of a predator about to pounce on its prey. ‘Hush,’ she commanded, ‘I need no reminder! Not even he shall stand in the way of my revenge or protect the murderer! I thank you, brave Miguel, for informing me of the accursed man’s presence, but you must add a second favour to your service, for which I shall be eternally grateful to you!”

‘Speak, Mademoiselle,’ said the porter. ‘You know that I would do anything for you that is within my power!’

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‘Very well – I must be told when that bloodthirsty murderer dares to enter the cave!’

‘You shall find out, I swear by the Blessed Virgin. It is not a breach of my oath to tell you, since you are one of those in the know. But Mademoiselle – surely you won’t throw yourself into danger? He is so cruel and savage that he wouldn’t even spare a woman!’

‘Have no worries, my friend,’ she said with a touch of scorn, ‘I merely wish to hurl his shameful deed in his face! Go now, Miguel – and accept the thanks of a woman who counts you among her truest friends!’

She held out her hand to him, which the giant touched with the very tips of his fingers and kissed respectfully.

He had scarcely left the room when the daughter of the shot customs officer hurried to one of the tables, upon whose tops a multitude of mostly very valuable objects were piled up, and from among them picked out a small dagger of Spanish workmanship, which she drew from its gold-chiselled sheath to examine the tip of the blade.

As she stood there, thrusting her small white hand into the air as though testing her strength against an invisible enemy, the sparkling gaze of her otherwise beautiful eyes took on an expression that could make even a brave man tremble!

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The Count of Lerida, as he called himself at the French court, had walked briskly down to the northern bay, where the boats usually land, as the surf does not rage as fiercely here as it does against the rocky wall of the Spanish

side. The two vessels were just approaching, and the Captain of the Night, by his position, indicated to them—as if by chance—the spot where they should moor, some distance from the numerous fishing boats and barges that lay at the shore, either for the purpose of their trade or to take bathers on pleasure trips. This slight precaution, if indeed it was one, was of little use, however; for with that unabashed curiosity characteristic of the inhabitants of the South—who live more on the streets and in the open air than do the northerners—a swarm of idlers from all walks of life had soon gathered round him, waiting for the boats to land.

The sight they presented as they drew nearer certainly justified this curiosity.

Both vessels—the gig[1] and the yacht's launch[2]—were fine, sturdy boats of a
design that suggested they were built for speed—a characteristic which the expert eye of the sailors present recognised immediately and which aroused open admiration. Above all, however, it was the crews of the boats themselves that captured everyone's attention. In contrast to the simple, uniform sailors' attire usually worn by the crews of [257]
English yachts usually wear, the attire of the rather numerous crew was as varied as their features. The crew seemed literally to be made up of individuals from all the coasts of the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, and the captain of this motley company appeared to have taken particular pleasure in encouraging the men to wear their national costumes, for these were rich and clean on every one of them. The four sailors in the captain's gig were a tall, lanky Swede, a Moor from the coast of Guinea in a rich, fanciful costume, a Neapolitan and a mulatto from the West Indies; at the helm, however, sat a young man in the picturesque Greek national costume.

The crew of the large boat was at least as motley a bunch. Englishmen, Frenchmen, Spaniards, Italians, Arabs and even a long-haired, red-skinned Indian from the mouth of the Orinoco made up the crew, all dressed in the most colourful costumes, as if they were off to a masquerade. But they all seemed to be excellent sailors and were a select group of strong, almost exclusively young and handsome men.

Only the boatswain, who was at the helm of the barge, was an exception. He was an older fellow, weather-beaten and grim-looking, with a face pockmarked by smallpox and several scars. His empty left eye socket was covered by a black plaster, which gave his whole countenance an even wilder air than it already possessed. A thick black,
[258]
already slightly streaked with grey, covered the lower part of his face.

A cheerful '*Viva, el capitano!*' greeted the Count as the light gig shot through the surf onto the sand, and with a bold and confident swing, the young Greek in the bow stepped ashore, respectfully doffed his red cap and reported: 'All is well on board, Excellenza! Your orders have been carried out and we have the trunks in the launch!'

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[1] The captain's small boat.

[2] The largest boat.

The young man used the lingua franca customary on the southern European coasts in his address, as did the entire crew, and the Count also replied to him in the same dialect, although – as several individual orders later showed – he spoke almost all the languages of his highly diverse ship's crew with considerable fluency.

'Well, Mauro,' said the captain, 'I knew I could rely on you and Master John. Did you bring the sea spider with you?'

'He's crouching in the launch under the bench. John has covered him with the boat's cover so that the spray won't spoil his finery, for the little devil insisted on putting on his best clothes, even though in them he looks like one of those dressed-up monkeys the Savoyards parade about with.'

'You're right, he's as clever and nimble as a monkey, but just as mischievous and curious. What's more, he's in good company with you, as it hasn't been many years since you were just as much of a rascal

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yourself! – But"—he lowered his voice and continued his speech in Modern Greek—"have you brought your weapons with you?"

"Yes, Excellenza – we are ready for anything! But what if they open the trunks?"

"They won't! – Here comes the launch! Just make sure that my orders are strictly followed and that the crew has as little contact as possible with the inhabitants until I have briefed them!"

'No worries, Excellenza!' He deftly caught the rope thrown to him by one of the sailors from the boat, and immediately a crowd of hands were ready to help pull it ashore. The young captain had noticed that among the gathered crowd of onlookers were old Cocles and another customs officer, who were watching the crew disembark with obvious curiosity. At the same time, he noticed that, some distance away, the very customs officer to whom the Empress's Chief Chamberlain had recommended him was just

shore.

The one-eyed helmsman had strolled leisurely ashore, carrying under his arm a strangely wriggling and shifting bundle wrapped in a sailor's cloak.

'We've reached land, Captain,' he reported, 'and here's that devil of a crab, which gave me enough trouble on the way to keep it calm.'

With that, he set his burden down on the ground, pulled away the cloak, and it became apparent that the bundle contained nothing

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more and nothing less than a human being, who, now freed from his covering, was bubbling and puffing, hopping from one leg to the other and, to the great amusement of the ship's crew and onlookers, furiously shaking his fist at the helmsman.

The little fellow was, in himself, a comical sight. He was a boy of about twelve years, but, due to his deformity, barely three feet tall. He had such a pronounced hump at the front and back that his small head, with its peculiar, almost frog-like face from which two sharp, mischievous and restless eyes sparkled, almost disappeared between them. His legs were as thin as spider's legs, but his arms were of unusual length, so that they reached down past his knees and, with their long, gaunt fingers, really gave the whole grotesque figure something that justified the nickname the boy went by,

. The ridiculousness of his appearance was further heightened by his finery. For the crippled lad was wearing the full costume of an Andalusian Majo, richly adorned with silver buttons, fringes and embroidery; not a single item was missing, from the garters, the shoes with their large ribbon rosettes, and the lilac velvet breeches, right down to the hairnet that encased his thick, bread-blond hair.

The little lad's animated gestures, combined with a few shrill sounds he uttered in anger, made it clear to those standing by that his physical disability was compounded by a lack of speech.

'Hush, lad,' the captain finally ordered. 'You [261]
You ought to be grateful to Master John for getting you safely through the surf, wrapped up so well. Go with the men who are to take the trunks to my flat, and make sure everything is in order for my dressing when I arrive. One of these gentlemen without shoes or stockings will show you the way to Mademoiselle Leboeuf's house for a few sous. 'The launch is to return on board in an hour, Master John, so let the men who are not on duty have a refreshment at the nearest tavern.' 'Under supervision!' he added quietly, 'and follow me! – What's that over there, and why aren't you moving on, lads?'

The question was directed at the six sailors who had begun to climb the riverside path with the three trunks and were being held up by old Cocles.

'You must take those trunks over to the customs office,' he said gruffly. 'Over there – they must be opened and inspected tomorrow, for the office closes at sunset.'

Indeed, the sun had already vanished below the horizon of the Atlantic Ocean in all the splendour of such a sunset, and the darkness was rapidly deepening.

'Move aside, you wooden-legged old scoundrel, or I'll give you a kick that'll send you all the way to your enema syringe over there, what you French call a lighthouse!' retorted one of the English sailors. 'We only have to obey our captain here!'
[262]

The captain had approached. 'Quiet, Jack,' he ordered, 'this man is a customs officer and is within his rights. As he is an old sailor who has earned his wounds with honour, a young upstart like you ought to treat him with more respect. 'Please forgive the young sea dog, Monsieur Cocles, and tell me whether it is really necessary to search the trunks at the customs office, given that they contain only my personal belongings?'

'Of course! *Parbleu* – what else would the customs service be there for? All the more so as one never knows what to make of the ships from which they come.'

'Then, lads, take the trunks back to the boat, and you, Monsieur'—he turned with a haughty and offended expression towards the customs officer, who had just approached accompanied by a second official— "I ask you to convey my apologies to Her Majesty's Chief Master of Ceremonies that I am unable to comply with the imperial summons to the evening reception, as, following such an insult, I prefer to return to my ship. – Mauro! The crew of the gig!"

The two customs officials, the officer and the inspector, hastened to offer their apologies in the face of this threat and to give Cocles a stern reprimand, which the old stiff-legged man swallowed bitterly, whereupon he hobbled off, muttering all manner of curses into his beard. No fewer than ten people from the crowd immediately offered to show the way, whereupon the sailors picked up their load once more and carried on with it.
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The young captain, however, addressed the customs officer in the presence of the helmsman.

'I thank you once again for your kindness, sir,' he said politely, 'and I shall be sure to praise it as it deserves. Perhaps, however, I can already show my gratitude on one point by repeating to you what Master John, the helmsman of the *Victory*, told me about the nature of the felucca which seemed so suspicious to you!'

'My lord,' replied the young man, delighted, 'you will do me a great favour with any information.'

"*I shall do so with pleasure!*[1] Well then – I was right! The vessel is not
French, but a Spanish one!"

"I thought as much!"

'Its crew made no secret of it when they visited my ship. My suspicions were correct. The ship is laden with the finest sherry and Alicante wine, and the lads came aboard the Victory to offer my steward there' – he pointed to the Greek –
'a few pints. It's a pity I wasn't on board; I could have made an excellent purchase.'

The customs officer pondered. 'The fellow is probably wisely keeping his distance, more than two miles from the coast, beyond which we can't search for him. We must
[264]
do anything until he attempts to land undeclared goods."

'Perhaps what I have yet to tell you will put your mind at rest. Master John here, who understands a little Spanish, claims to have heard the men referring to their ship as the "San Martino" in conversation.'

"*Diable!* Then old Cocles was right, and it's that devil El Tuerto who's lying in wait for another chance to play a trick on us! Ha—if only we could catch him, I'd be a man made!"

"*It is likely!* But you have ample force at your disposal to pounce on the fellow!"

"What do you mean, My Lord?"

"Well, I mean the Imperial Aviso steamer anchored beneath the lighthouse?"

'Damn it – we'd be in a fine mess with such a request. Those gentlemen consider themselves part of the navy and would sooner let the entire Spanish smuggling flotilla land on our coast than stoke even a single shovelful of coal for customs – unless, that is, a special order from the Emperor or the Minister of War compelled them to do so. No, My Lord, we are reliant on our own meagre resources and must keep our eyes open as much as we can. I shall do so all the more carefully following the hint you have given me, and have already made all the necessary arrangements to prevent any landing."

[1] I do so with pleasure.

Accompanied by the helmsman, Mauro and the [265]
dwarf, had reached the heights of the Plateau de St. Luz, where the path branches off towards the houses on the southern shore, the Côte Basque. The Cavalier stopped and offered his hand to the official.

‘Once again, my thanks, sir. I must now hurry to get ready, so as not to keep our mutual patron, the Lord Chief Chamberlain, waiting; and so I bid you farewell for today and wish you from the bottom of my heart that you do not let Señor El Tuerto slip away from you tonight!’

A polite bow dismissed the two customs officers, who walked away, enchanted by the trustworthy and open manner of the distinguished gentleman.

The Count took a deep breath once they had gone. “*Caramba*,” he said, “it’s a good thing that vermin has gone on its way. Come on, Jones and Mauro, our day’s work has only just begun.”

He strode briskly ahead of them towards the house of the beautiful Margaritta.

The six sailors had already arrived there with the trunks and had set them down in the kitchen hallway. A cheerful fire was burning in the hearth; rum and sugar were laid out in abundance on the table, but the lady of the house and her servants were nowhere to be seen.

‘Post the sentries, John!’ ordered the captain, ‘and send for Miguel, the porter.’ Then he went up to his cabin.

The helmsman of the ‘Victory’ went out with
three [266]
sailors. The others, along with Mauro, having carried the smaller ship’s chest through the inner staircase into the upper saloon, immediately set about unpacking the two larger trunks.

Amongst a few items of clothing, a large quantity of valuable goods came to light, the importation of which into France is subject to high duties; most of them were English-made.

Master John, who returned shortly afterwards, had the goods gathered into a pile and wrapped in large linen cloths, then he turned to the Greek.

‘Do you remember the oath you swore when you joined the crew of the
‘Victory’?«

‘The captain commanded, and I obeyed!’

‘It matters not how or why you swore. You took that oath upon your Greek cross, and I merely remind you that a hundred strong arms would be ready to plunge six inches of a fine Catalan knife between your ribs should it ever enter your mind to betray a single word of what you are about to see.’

‘Don’t talk nonsense,’ said the Greek, ‘you know me.’

‘Now, all four of you, turn your faces towards the door for a moment!’

When they had obeyed, the old man pressed a concealed button in a dark corner of the room. A sound like that of a heavy roller could be heard, whilst the helmsman pressed himself against the side wall of the
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hearth, which appeared to be built of heavy stones. When, at his call, the sailors turned back to him, they found that the entire hearth, with its fire and utensils, had been pushed aside by a good five or six feet, and Master John was already busy lifting the contraband goods onto the spot where the hearth had previously stood."

'Well then, Master Mauro,' he said, 'you now know part of the secret, and I regret that you cannot see the whole of it at once or descend into the rock-vaults. But the captain is likely to need us, so this time it will have to be Rafael and the redhead. Right then, lads, climb onto the plank, take the goods down to the hold and get everything ready in case we need the caves."

The two designated sailors helped load the secret trapdoor, and once they had taken their places on top of the goods, the helmsman pressed a second concealed spring, whereupon a section of the floor measuring about 5 feet square immediately began to sink slowly into the depths.

A damp, violent draught of air rose from it, and the roar of the surf penetrated upwards through the chasm, as if it were raging right beneath them.

Mauro had approached the opening and was peering curiously into the depths, where shortly afterwards a faint glimmer of light shone like a star.

'Be careful, lad,' warned the helmsman, 'you do not yet know the nature and dangers of this place. One false step and you are lost.

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Here comes the plank back up, and here the captain is giving the signal that he needs us.'

Indeed, the shrill sound of a boatswain's whistle could be heard from the upper deck. After the helmsman had used the secret mechanism to return the stone hearth to its original position, thereby removing all traces of what had happened, he climbed a flight of stairs—with Mauro following behind—which led from a corner of the kitchen corridor to the upper deck.

In the saloon they found the captain, who, with the dwarf's help, had put on a simple yet very elegant outfit from the contents of the open suitcase. The dark tailcoat, cut in the very latest style by Stolz, the king of London's tailors, set off his elegant, supple figure; a pair of patent leather boots, barely larger than a child's, revealed his aristocratically small foot; and a magnificent greenish diamond sparkled on the dainty jabot. Hanging from a fine gold chain in the tailcoat's buttonhole were the English and French medals of the Crimean Campaign, and on his chest the Knight's Cross of the Order of St Mauritius; on the table beside him lay a hat and gloves from Alexander's shop in Paris – in short, the smuggler-captain in no way denied his right to the distinguished rank he had claimed for himself.

The Count was just putting the finishing touches to his cravat in front of the wide Venetian mirror when the two of them

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entered. The curtains at the door to the study were drawn tightly shut.

'Are the guards posted on both sides of the street?'

"Yes, sir!"

"And the goods?"

"They're in the vaults. Rafael and the red-haired Portuguese man have gone down there as well, just in case."

"Very well. We may need them. Did you all understand my signals from the customs post?"

"I think so, sir!" The old man laughed. "I mean, you're the only person in the whole world who'd think of giving orders to smuggle from a customs post. *Goddamn it* – I'd really like to know how you got this whole thing started?"

"Chance was on my side. However, we have more important things to do. – Has the San Martino been informed that he is to stand by for an expedition this evening?"

'We gave him the signal, and as soon as it got dark, the lieutenant went over to brief the Spanish cutthroat.'

"And the Montgomery?"

"The steamer will position itself three miles away at nightfall, between the lighthouse and the signal station."

'That would be a two-hour row,' muttered the captain. 'So there must certainly be something [270]
to prevent the pursuit. Now listen to me carefully, for this concerns matters of the utmost importance—life and death!"

"I'm listening, sir!"

"I do not know whether a certain undertaking will be feasible, but in any case everything must be ready for it. The customs officers strongly suspect that the felucca belonging to the
'San Martino' and believe that it will attempt to land goods tonight. All the guards on the southern bank are therefore at their posts, and the San Martino's boats will be attacked by the officials."

"But shouldn't we warn our old comrades?"

"No – at least not until the very last moment. Even if the entire cargo were to be lost and the lads had to drink seawater, it wouldn't matter. But it needn't come to that. You do have your clothes and masks with you, don't you?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Very well, then! In half an hour you must be back out to sea in the launch. As soon as you're out of sight, hoist the sail—the wind is favourable—and have the crew change their clothes. Wait off the roadstead until the San Martino's boats approach. Then take command of them and take half the
crew of the launch with you. It is important to me that all the customs posts be moved to the southern bank and that the entire coastline be familiar with the [271]
battle. The rest of the crew, with the barge, will return to the vicinity of the imperial villa, moor there and keep a close watch on everything. The password for my order, which will be given to them, is the name: Ortega! – If no order has been received by dusk, they are to return to the Victory. You yourself are to hold out in the engagement for as long as possible before you withdraw. In any case, the San Martino must then weigh anchor and be under the protection of the Spanish coast by sunrise. – Have you understood me clearly?'

“I believe so, sir!”

“Then get to work. One more thing – tell the sentries on the road that if anyone presents themselves with the watchword ‘Ortega’, they are to be brought to me immediately! Now farewell, and if luck is on our side –” he cut himself off and merely gave the departing man a confidential nod.

“Now, Mauro, over to you! Where’s the gig’s crew?”

“Two are standing guard on the street; the other two are in the nearest posada by the riverbank.”

‘First, get Seespinne to strip off his flashy clothes and give him some that make him less conspicuous and that he can easily shed. In this cupboard—’ he pushed the wallpaper aside and opened a hidden door beneath it, ‘—you’ll find complete customs officers’ uniforms. Take four of them and the coiled rope that’s lying there. Then wait downstairs for the porter Miguel and give him his instructions,

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as I’m unlikely to have time for it. You’ll accompany him and Seespinne to the boat; call the Maltese man and inform him that the gig is to cast off at 9 o’clock. The men must put on the customs officers’ uniforms so that, should they be encountered, they’ll be taken for such. Miguel knows the coast inside out and every rock along it. The boat must remain out of sight of the shore until it reaches the vicinity of the steamer beneath the lighthouse. Wrap the oars so that any noise is avoided. They should position themselves behind the Cap *de la Frégate*, as close as possible to the steamer, but in such a way that they cannot be seen. Then they must strip the boy of his clothes, loop the rope round his neck and leave the rest to him – he already knows what he has to do.”

Seespinne grinned gleefully and clapped her hands.

‘That little devil,’ the captain continued, ‘swims and dives like a dolphin. The boat must keep a close watch out for him when he returns, for I would not wish to lose him, even at the cost of tonight’s success; the scoundrel knows all my habits and is indispensable to me. As soon as they have him back on board, they are to make their way back just as cautiously as they came and take up position behind St Martin’s, the rock directly opposite the imperial villa. It is about 40 fathoms from the terrace, and from there they can hear and see what is happening on it. When they hear the cry of a seagull from the terrace twice, Miguel is to pull up as close as possible and wade ashore with the Maltese.” [273]

‘And me?’

“Once you have carried out your mission, you are to return here as soon as possible and accompany me. Put on your struka[1]; it will make you less recognisable.”

The Greek knew how little his young captain liked having his orders repeated, so he merely replied by shaking his head—the oriental sign of assent—and pulled the dwarf out of the doorway by the collar of his fine doublet.

As soon as the door had closed behind him, the young adventurer drew back the curtain of the cabinet, pressed the spring on the door, and it slid back into its panelling.

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[1] The brown, shaggy cloak of the Albanians.

A charming sight met his eyes. The young mother sat on the low Han mat, holding the child to her breast, where it drank its nourishment from the eternal, sole and true source of life—which, alas, is so often replaced by foreign substitutes.

It struck the wild young adventurer like a sacred admonition when the young woman fixed her large, dark eyes, full of love, upon the father of her child, and he stood motionless for a few moments, lost in contemplation of this scene.

How often does this image of peaceful domestic happiness present itself to a man, and how often does he cast it aside in the overwhelming surge of his passions!

Admittedly, this picture involves love, gentleness and
[274]
forbearance – qualities that are all too rare in women *once* they have attained a husband!'

She smiled sweetly at him as she modestly covered herself and laid the boy on his mat, then stood before him. 'Holy Madonna, how handsome and stately you look, Juan! Your Margaritta has never seen you like this before! How unhappy I am that you cannot stay with me this evening. But promise me, love of my heart, to return as soon as you possibly can!'

He looked at her with a distracted gaze. "As soon as I can! – It shall be done, don't worry! Have you sent the maid to fetch a carriage to take me to the castle? I only have half an hour left!"

'I've sent her to the Hôtel Gardères to arrange it. But where is that poor, stunted lad who was attending to you?'

"Away with the men who were with me!"

"Juan – you're hiding something from me – you're not going to the castle! You're trying to deceive me! You're planning an expedition tonight – I heard the trapdoor opening to the underground vaults – I implore you, be careful, the customs officers are on the alert!"

"Fool – I already gave you my word earlier that I'll have nothing to do with the smugglers this evening. Go to bed and don't worry about a thing, even if the lads are attacked. I won't be there. – Wait – here comes someone!"
[275]

There was a knock at the door – the lady of the house quickly hid behind the curtain.

"Who's there?"

The door leading to the staircase down to the lower room opened; the broad, sturdy figure of the porter appeared on the threshold.

"It's me, Monsieur, Miguel, the one you sent for."

"Good that you're here. My steward already has my instructions for you. Didn't you meet him?"

'Indeed, Monsieur. I shall obey your instructions, though I would rather not have left here this evening. But that is not the reason I have come up!'

'What else, then?'

'There are two strangers at the door who wish to speak to the Count of Lerida and have sent this card.'

The captain glanced at the single word written on it. Then he asked hurriedly:

"Where are the caballeros?"

“They’re waiting at the garden gate! They must have had the password, as they’ve passed the guard.”

The captain hurried over to the curtain and whispered a few words through it. Then he beckoned to the smuggler. “You may go – I shall bring the strangers up myself. Mauro is waiting for you down by the hearth. Steer the boat carefully and safely, and keep your eyes and ears open!” He walked through the door to the outer
[276]
veranda, and he could be heard hurrying down the stairs.

Just as quickly, the lady of the house emerged from behind the curtain and was by the porter’s side.

‘Who are the strangers?’

“I only recognised one of them, Mademoiselle. It’s the Viéjo, the old man from Bayonne whom we must obey—the very same who was here after your father’s death.”

“Why aren’t you staying here? Where are you going?”

“I have no idea, Mademoiselle; – all I know at the moment is that the young captain has ordered me to set sail in his boat, and to the French roadstead at that!”

“And the smugglers? – El Tuerto?”

The giant turned pale, but hesitated before answering.

“You remember your promise? What about him? You’re hiding something from me!”

“Mademoiselle . . .”

“Speak up!”

“The one-eyed man was in your house!”

“At my house?”

“Yes, Mademoiselle – at least, that’s where he was coming from when I met him.”

“Oh, if only I were in your place and had a trusty blade in my hand. I thank you for the news – I shall keep watch myself now. Off you go – Juan is coming back and must not find you here any longer!”
[277]

She hurried behind the curtain as the porter left the room and rolled the door into its hinges. When the captain, leading the two strangers, stepped into the room from the balcony, it was empty. He carefully inspected all the doors and locked them from the inside; only then did he turn to his companions and politely ask them to take a seat and remove their coats and hats, which completely covered them.

The drawing room was lit by two silver lamps and a few candles, so that bright light fell upon those present as they now settled down—one on the sofa, the other in an armchair—without, however, taking off their long Spanish cloaks. They were both men in their early fifties. The first, who seemed familiar to the young captain, was a tall, gaunt man with sharp features and piercing eyes. There was something observant and cautious about his whole demeanour and even in his movements, and he spoke softly and slowly. The second was likewise tall, but more robust and sturdier than his companion, who showed him obvious deference. He wore the simple, dark robes of a country priest, and yet – had the tonsure on his head, still covered with thick dark hair, not proved his status – one might have been led to believe, judging by the bold, resolute expression on his nobly formed face,

one was in the presence of an old soldier. He regarded the young man with an attentive, scrutinising gaze.
[278]

‘It seems you were about to go out, Señor Don Juan?’ asked the gaunt man.

“To do my duty, Monsieur. And do you know where?”

‘We have only just arrived from Bayonne. How can we possibly know what adventures Mr Juan Waterford, in his usual manner, has already got himself mixed up in at a time when the utmost caution and prudence are required and the most vital interests are at stake?’

‘You will calm down, Monsieur,’ said the young man mockingly, ‘when you learn that the captain of the *Schwalbe*—or *Victory*, as it is now called—will have the honour of appearing in the salons of the Emperor and Empress of France in half an hour.’

‘We have no time for jokes,’ said the other man irritably.

‘We certainly have no time to explain the matter, but nevertheless it is a fact,’ replied the young man with the same mocking smile. “Of course, it is not Captain Jack Waterford but the Count Juan Lerida who has been invited into the court circle. And he may well be better placed than the smuggler Jack to render a service to the illustrious House of Bourbon today that is more important than ten shipments of weapons to the Basque coast.”

‘What do you mean by that?’

“Before I speak, I ask you to tell me this gentleman’s name.” [279]

“You know, Señor Don Juan, that I alone am responsible!”

“The contrabandist of Spain and France, yes, Monsieur! – However, as I might well have the honour of belonging not only to this secret society but also, to some extent, to half a dozen others of the same sort—such as the most venerable Camorra, Young Italy, the *Liga Polska*, the Fenieri, the Nihilists and the Legitimist League—you will excuse me if I wish to know my companions!’

‘I have no intention whatsoever of concealing my identity from you,’ said the priest.
“I am Francesco Felix *Solano*, Bishop of Tarragona.”

The young man bowed respectfully. “I had almost suspected as much, Señor, and am therefore hastening to deliver this letter to Your Grace in person.”

He took a small sealed letter from his wallet and handed it to the high dignitary.

The bishop immediately broke the seal and looked for the signature.

‘Ah, from His Royal Highness, the Infante Don Juan himself!’ The captain bowed.

‘The Infante commends you to me, Count,’ said the Bishop, ‘for I know that you are fully entitled to that title, most warmly indeed. He praises your courage, your devotion and your resolve, even your shrewdness. That is a great deal in one person! His Royal Highness,’ the prelate continued with a smile, ‘warns
[280]
against just one of your traits; he asks that you guard against it in the presence of beautiful ladies!”

The young captain shrugged. ‘Everyone has their *suijada!*[1]; mine is *to mirar á las mugeres!*[2] I have not, like Your Grace, taken the *voto de* castid[3].’

The bishop bit his lip lightly – given the various anecdotes circulating about his somewhat wild youth, he felt a slight twinge.

‘Do you have the shipment of weapons on your ship?’

“It was transferred in its entirety from the yacht to the San Martino last night; the San Martino will weigh anchor tomorrow before sunrise, after carrying out a small smuggling operation on its own account.”

‘It would have been better,’ said the bishop reluctantly, ‘given that such important interests are at stake, not to jeopardise them for the sake of a trifling advantage.’

‘*El Tuerto*,’ said the young man with a smile, ‘has his whims just as much as I do. Moreover, Monsignor, it is necessary today of all days. Did His Royal Highness say anything further to Your Grace in the letter?’

‘Indeed, Señor Conde. The Infante speaks of a plan to preserve the legitimate lines of the illustrious House of Bourbon, which is now in the gravest danger, even from the last of its thrones, from the revolution

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, to their sacred rights in one fell swoop.’

‘That is so, Monsignor.’

‘His Royal Highness has referred me to you, Señor Conde!’

“I now find myself in the same precarious position,” said the adventurer, smiling and bowing significantly to the bishop’s companion, “in which our esteemed friend, the Consul, found himself with Your Grace a short while ago.”

“I understand, Señor, but Don Navâles was far more of a Carlist and a loyal supporter of the rightful ruler before he became the head of the Contrebandista and a resident of Bayonne. Speak freely in his presence, even on matters of political interest.”

‘In that case, Monsignor, I shall be brief! – I have offered to abduct His Majesty Emperor Napoleon and not release him until he has provided sufficient guarantees for the House of Bourbon.’

The bishop looked at the bold and reckless speaker with consternation. “You are playing a poor joke, Señor Conde,” he said hesitantly. “Such a plan – however momentous it may be – is folly; it is impossible! What do you say to that, Señor Don Navâles?”

‘The Count is playing one of his wild pranks!’

‘Sennores,’ said the adventurer calmly, stretching out his feet and playing with the precious berlocques on his watch chain, ‘I have given this some thought myself, and

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have come to a wiser realisation. Given the current mood of the nations, it would probably be of little use to Their Majesties King Francis of Naples, Don Carlos VI of Spain, the Duke of Parma and the Count of Chambord to have Emperor Louis Napoleon in their hands, even if this were achieved with the utmost

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[1] Weak point.

[2] Looking at women.

[3] Vow of chastity.

security. Her Majesty Queen Isabella would not, for that reason, give up her royal *'petits plaisirs'*; King Victor Emmanuel would be rid of a very troublesome overseer; and in Paris, at most, Mr Plonplon would play the role of the very dubious guardian of his little cousin! No – we must leave His Majesty the Emperor Louis Napoleon on the throne of France for as long as possible, for he is a true blessing for a Europe so prone to revolutions. I merely intend to steal his son from him!'

The prelate cast a serious, steady glance at him, whereupon he rested his head in his hand.
'Once again, Señor Conde, do not joke about such serious matters!'

"Well – to use the language of your own diocese, Monsignor, by the Holy Cross of Montserrat! I swear to you that I am not joking, but speaking in all seriousness, and I am delighted to have met Your Grace today of all days, when a fortunate coincidence seems to have placed this opportunity right in my lap."

"What – you really intended to make this attempt today?"

"I have made all the necessary arrangements. Consider
[283]
Take this matter calmly and seriously, Monsignor! Emperor Napoleon himself is of no use to us, but his sole heir certainly is. With this child in our possession, we can dictate laws to Emperor Louis Napoleon, which he in turn will impose on Europe. The first would be the restoration of the Kingdom of Naples, the Papal States and the duchies in Italy, and support for a pronunciamento led by Your Grace to elevate Count Montemolin to the throne of Spain as the rightful ruler.'

'You are fantasising! Emperor Napoleon would never agree to such a thing. At most, he would promise everything under the sun to regain his son and heir, and then do as he pleased anyway. Moreover, you have completely excluded the main line of the Bourbons—the rightful royal family of France—from your calculations!'

'Your Grace has not heard me out! The direct line of the French Bourbons—which is the only one that comes into question, since, despite all the mergers, the Orléans are under general excommunication as the instigators or principal beneficiaries of the European upheaval—has no direct descendants. The Countess of Chambord is already 43 years old. Among all the princesses of the House of Bourbon – excluding the Orléans – there is only one who is of the same age as the current Crown Prince of France: Princess Luigia, sister of the King of Naples."
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'What – are you thinking of a union between the Houses of Bourbon and Bonaparte?'

'Why not? In this line, it is possible and would put an end to all strife. Or do you believe that Emperor Louis Napoleon would not agree to this condition and would not realise that, by doing so, he could place his dynasty on a firmer foundation than by relying on Monsieur Plonplon and his generals? The Pope, Italy, Spain, and even the Houses of Austria and Bavaria—who would be satisfied by it—would protect this alliance, which would put an end to a long-standing feud and give the French Legitimists the long-awaited opportunity to reconcile themselves with the ruling power!"

'But they are children of four and five years old! . . .'

‘The Catholic Church,’ said the adventurer dryly, ‘has, throughout history, always reserved the right to sanction and validly conclude such alliances even whilst the children are still in the cradle.’

The bishop had leapt to his feet and was pacing agitatedly up and down the room. Then he suddenly stopped in front of the young man.

‘Be honest, Señor Conde,’ he said, ‘this diabolical—though I must admit, brilliant—plan did not originate with you. If you belonged to the Jesuits, I would find it understandable!’

‘Your Grace is mistaken! I have already told you that I belong to virtually all the secret political societies and committees of the old order, and, as you will soon see,
[285]
the New World as well, but I have nothing to do with the Fathers of St Ignatius. I am a pupil of my uncle Lord Heresford, and work on my own account and for my own pleasure. Let the gentlemen therefore declare whether they wish to support me or not! I think I am assured of your silence!”

The bishop was still pacing restlessly up and down. ‘At least give me a guarantee that the leaders of the Carlist committee are not opposed to your audacious, but – I must admit – promising idea!’

‘Your Grace will have heard that some daring and resourceful Americans were toying with the idea of abducting Emperor Napoleon I from St Helena by means of a submarine!’

“I recall that.”

‘Well then! Shipbuilding has made very significant progress since then.’ He threw open the balcony door. ‘If the sun were to cast its rays across the Bay of Biscay at this very moment, I might be able to show you, through a good telescope, some light and slender masts, which, three nautical miles away, like the mast of a fishing boat, sway above the surface of the sea, whilst beneath them, in the bosom of the ever-swaying sea, a stately, well-manned ship floats, ready to whisk Emperor Napoleon or his son away in its secure, undetectable holds to the untraceable hideaways of the Florida lagoons.”
[286]

‘But what role, then, have you envisaged for us, or for me?’ asked the prelate hastily.

‘Judging by the fact that Your Grace have come from Tarragona to Biscay to personally oversee the handover of the arms shipment from the Carlist Committee in London, may I assume that a new attempt is afoot to avenge the defeat at Tortosa and the death of General Ortega[1]!?’

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[1] The still young General Ortega, commander of the Balearic Islands, was captured by his own men during the attempt in April 1860 to proclaim Count von *Montemolin* (son of the well-known pretender Don Carlos) as Carl VI., was captured by his own men and shot in Tortosa on 22 April. The Count of Montemolin and his brother Ferdinand were present during the undertaking and had likewise been captured on the 21st. On 23 April, the Count subsequently issued a statement in Tortosa declaring that he renounced his claims to the throne and recognised Queen *Isabella* as the rightful heir to the throne, whereupon both princes were released and left Spain. His brother *Juan de Bourbon* sent a letter from London to the Spanish Cortes on 2 June, in which he declared that, for his part, he renounced his and his family’s rights to

‘My diocese extends to the regions on this side of the Ebro. It would therefore be no surprise to find me in Irun or San Sebastián. But to you, Señor Conde, I must say that the patriots of Biscay and Navarre are determined to avenge that defeat at the first opportunity, and that, apart from my loyalty to His Majesty King Charles VI,
[287]
I also have a personal interest, as General Ortega was a relative of mine.’

‘Your Grace must also bear in mind,’ continued the Count, ‘that France would generally welcome a change in Spain at present, as the Duke of Tetuan’s victories in Morocco are somewhat inconvenient for Algeria. To put it briefly, I could think of no better negotiator than Your Grace should our plan succeed in dealing with Emperor Louis Napoleon or Madame Eugénie!”

‘But for that I would need to know more details about the plan – about the place to which the prince has been taken?’

“Why? You must be able to say in all conscience that you do not know this. The risk should, as far as possible, be mine alone. If the matter is successful, Your Grace will receive the necessary address in London from Don José Navâles here, through which the negotiations can be conducted.”

The prelate still seemed to be wavering. “Tell me honestly, Señor Conde, what is the reward you demand for yourself if your daring plan succeeds?”

‘For myself? *Oh yes!* – I haven’t actually given that any thought yet! I’ve got myself involved in this because it’s a daring venture and is bound to cause a stir! – This gentleman here can tell you that, thanks to my uncle’s generosity, I am quite wealthy and am involved in the noble Association of the Contrebandista purely out of a passion for it
[288]
. The only thing I ask is not to be sent to Cayenne or Ceuta[1] as a result, but to be allowed to court the ladies of the courts of Saint-Cloud and Madrid without hindrance. But Your Grace must make up your mind, for I can clearly hear the sound of a carriage on the hard ground of the Plateau de Saint Luz; the clock shows a quarter to eight, and a simple caballero such as myself cannot possibly keep the Emperor and Empress of France waiting.’

The prelate hesitated for a moment, then said resolutely: ‘You are risking your life for the good cause, Señor Conde; it would be cowardly of me not to at least accept the role you have in mind for me. May the blessing of the Holy Church be with you. I await your news!’

A knock at the door interrupted the conversation.

“Who’s there?”

“Mauro, Your Excellency!”

The prelate and the Viéjo, the contrabandist, wrapped themselves in their coats and pulled their wide-brimmed hats down over their foreheads, whilst the captain went to the door and opened it.

‘What’s the matter? Has everything been taken care of?’

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uphold the Spanish throne. Consequently, Count Montemolin also withdrew his renunciation in a letter from Cologne dated 15 June.

[1] The Spanish deportation centre.

‘Yes, Signor Capitano! The boat has gone!’

“And is the carriage here?”

‘Yes, Signor! But it is an imperial carriage, [289]
sent from the palace to collect Your Excellency, and a young man, dressed in gold braid like the Pasha of Smyrna, is waiting downstairs for your orders.”

The young captain turned to his guests with a smile. “You see, señores, such courtesy must not be ignored. Go and get ready to accompany me – I shall follow straight away!”

The Greek took his leave.

‘Here, Señor Don José,’ continued the Count, ‘are the consignment notes for the cargo, together with the invoices. Hopefully, the felucca will successfully land the crates at one of its hiding places on the Basque coast. It would be best if you both left Biarritz this very evening – by tomorrow morning it might no longer be possible!’

The bishop stepped closer to him and shook his hand. ‘If your daring venture should fail,’ he said with warm sympathy, ‘have you at least thought of ensuring your escape?’

‘Good heavens – they’d have a hard time catching up with me! Even the most suspicious customs officer has no idea that the *Victory* now has, in addition to her sails, a fine propeller that can raise her funnel in ten minutes and outrun every steamer on the continent. By the way – *‘la mala yerba crece mucho!*[1] as the Spanish proverb says. Farewell, Monsignor! Should we
[290]
meet again, I hope to greet you as Archbishop of Toledo[2] with the honour of the red hat!’

He slung a dark Carbonari over his arm and, hat in hand, opened the door to the veranda.

All three left the drawing room without Don Juan so much as glancing towards the study, where he knew Margaritta and her child to be.

A few minutes later, the rumbling of the imperial carriage could be heard as it whisked the handsome adventurer away to the Villa Eugénie.
[291]

In Siberia!

The brief period which, at 64 degrees north latitude—that is, almost within the Arctic Circle—is considered summer, – that is to say, during which the snow melts on the western slopes of the Stanovoy Mountains, allowing meagre stalks to sprout from the ground and twigs from the low coniferous undergrowth or the birch thickets for a few weeks, and the sun dips below the horizon for only a few hours – in other words, July and August – had long since passed; winter had returned four weeks earlier, and the snowstorm was sweeping with tremendous force across the tundra and through the desolate valleys.

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[1] Weeds do not rot.

[2] The Archbishop of Toledo is the Primate of Spain.

It was still early in the morning when all the inhabitants of the small colony of Katemskoi—consisting of a few wretched log cabins and yurts, one of the old zavods or tribute stations for the Yakut and Tungus tribes between the upper Lena region and Okhotsk—gathered in front of the log cabin of the holova, or community leader,
[292]
. A narty[1] with a wicker basket made of willow, mounted on light runners that were narrow and high at the front and widened towards the rear, stood by the porch; and beside the team, in his sanejach, wrapped in a fur coat made of double reindeer hides, his legs covered with long torbassy, his winter boots, and with a pipe, a pair of pliers[2], a wormwood pouch and a knife on his belt, a bow and quiver slung over his shoulder, and a long stick in his hand to steer his mail sledge, an old Yakut stood waiting; but this mail sled itself was drawn by twelve dogs harnessed in pairs, about the size of our sheepdogs, with grubby yellow-grey coats and sturdy bone structure, which had now settled comfortably in the snow. Two of the Yenisei Cossacks, wearing pointed Kyrgyz fur caps with wide ear and cheek flaps, clad in warm armiaks[3] made of sheep's wool and covered with wolf-fur coats, were already seated on the high saddles, which were fitted with thick felt blankets, called pot-niki, strapped to small, wild-looking and unassuming yet extraordinarily hardy steppe horses, and seemed to be waiting impatiently for the occupants of the sledge they were to accompany.

Having just spoken of the entire population of the colony, we must immediately note that this consisted of no more than twenty people, of whom about a third were women and children. Hardship and suffering, or dull indifference, lay upon most of them
[293]
faces, some of which betrayed Tatar or Mongolian ancestry. Some faces displayed the broad Russian features, with features marred by brandy or the narcotic effects of tobacco substitutes—mainly the poisonous larch fungus—but some still bore the unmistakable mark of higher birth and former happy circumstances.

'*Well*,' said one of the Cossacks, 'if our old man doesn't hurry up, we won't reach the station house at Maja today and may have to spend the night in the snow. Where the devil is that priest?'

'He's talking to the Silent One,' said one of the colonists.

'What sort of nonsense is that Warnak[4] spouting? Don't you know, lad, that a Cossack has the right to tug at your beard and give you a good thrashing? How dare you say that one can speak to a mute, you son of a bitch?'

At the insult, the convict—even though he had in fact been sentenced to katorga, that is, hard labour—cast a venomous glance at the Cossack, but, mindful of the massive nahaska, the Kyrgyz kanchuh, that the man was holding in his hand,

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[1] Dog-drawn cart.

[2] For plucking out beard hairs.

[3] Outer coat.

[4] Thief, scoundrel; the derogatory term for convicted common criminals.

very submissively: ‘How have I offended you, Batiuszki?[1] I am not speaking of a mute, but of one who
[294]
refuses to speak to us, even though he is no better than we are. God and the Tsar alone know why he is here! But look, here they both come!”

From one of the meagre yurts—constructed of poles, birch bark and reindeer skins, and covered with earth—two men stepped out into the open and strode towards the log cabin at Holowa.

They were both elderly men, one of them, admittedly, ten or fifteen years older than the other. But even the burden of sixty years and the terrible sufferings he must have endured had not been able to bend his tall, noble figure or dim the lustre of his eyes, which gazed down ahead of him, sombre and stern. He was dressed in a loose-fitting, brown-coloured armiak, resembling a dressing gown, which hung down to his feet, and wore a fur cap on his bald head, with the fur turned inwards in the Yakut style. Despite the awkward cut of his attire, which was completed by a pair of high boots made of horsehide, known as ‘sary’, there was something orderly and military about it.

He walked alongside his companion with his head bowed and seemed unmoved and indifferent to the man’s words.

The latter was a solemn-looking clergyman of the Basilian Order, which maintains a monastery in Irkutsk; however, he was not wearing the Order’s white habit, but rather the dark robes of the Catholic clergy, over which was draped a fur coat made from the pelt of a black Siberian bear, whilst his legs were clad in loose felt boots
[295]
. If ever the holy mission of consolation has demanded sacrifice and effort, it is that carried out by a small number of clergy of the Catholic Church in the desolate regions of Siberia. Setting out from Tobolsk and Irkutsk, where these pious and venerable men are stationed to serve the two General Governatorates of Western and Eastern Siberia, they traverse—amid a thousand sufferings and privations—the vast expanses of land from Lake Baikal to the Arctic Ocean, from the Urals to Kamchatka, and on every journey visit all the stations of the exiles in order to bring the eternal *consolations* of religion to the *‘Nieszčastbyi’*, the ‘unf*ortunate* ones’, as they are compassionately called in popular parlance, the eternal consolations of religion!

The Russian Government, which, whilst displaying such tyrannical harshness in some matters, acts in a peculiarly liberal manner in others, has so far placed no obstacle in the way of this pastoral care provided by the Catholic Church. Admittedly, a strict oath obliges these clergymen to refrain from any political contact with the exiles.

Before they reached the group gathered round the sledge, the priest’s companion stopped and extended his hand to him.

‘Let us part, Father, and may God grant you a long and blessed ministry here on earth. I hope to see you again up there after this!’

“I hope so, even in this world. I hope, before I meet the Saviour, to hear from your own lips that, like Him, you have forgiven your enemies and no longer curse those who have caused you suffering!”
[296]

[1] Little Father.

The stooped man straightened up vigorously, his eyes blazing with a dark glare as he looked upon the clergyman's gentle face.

'Forgive? Do you know who I am? Have you seen the flames of Praga blaze, the children of Polish mothers impaled on the bayonets of the Russian henchmen? Have you ever languished in the dungeons beneath this Tsar's palace, in a dungeon that makes the torture chambers of Venice seem like a happy abode? Have you fathomed the depths of the lead pits of Nerchinsk and left your very life-force beneath the blows of these executioners' sticks? *Forgive?* Will the enslaved, murdered fatherland, these mutilated limbs, forgive? Do you seek forgiveness from God – from a man who has suffered as I have, you will find only a curse!"

The priest turned away, shaken. 'Unfortunate man,' he said, 'whose name I do not even know, since you yourself concealed it in holy confession, but who surely once shone among the noblest and finest of your unfortunate fatherland – is there nothing I can do to ease the remainder of your life? I shall speak to the Horodiczny[1] of this station and urge him to show every leniency – our licence from the government permits this."

'The Holowa of the station,' said the exile, 'is, as you know, an old Frenchman, a man of honour who

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already grants me every favour he can bestow. You have done all the good you could do for me; the Holy Sacrament has strengthened me for life's final struggle. The one thing I still asked of you – the acceptance and delivery of my will – you have refused me . . . "

'I have taken an oath!' the priest interrupted him.

"I know that, and I resign myself to it, although it will compel me to entrust my final, sacred word to my country and my brothers to a man whom my better self compels me to despise, even though he suffers under the same tyranny as I do. If you can do anything about it, save that girl, Holowa's granddaughter, from the dreadful influence of the Russian!"

The priest looked up questioningly, but at that moment several people stepped out of the porch of the log cabin, and the condemned man turned away quickly, as if he did not wish to meet them.

'Your time is up,' he said, 'and mine too! May the Blessed Virgin bless your journey!' He hurried away, towards his lonely yurt.

Three people had stepped out of the log cabin, built of spruce trunks, its gaps filled with clay and moss, and protected as far as possible from the winter cold by a mound of earth: two men and a girl. One was an old man approaching his seventies. Like the Pole, there was something neat and military about his bearing, which made him

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distinguished him favourably from the natives and the convicts. Although he wore the local costume, the sharp features of his deeply lined face, his aquiline nose and his large dark eyes nevertheless betrayed his southern origins.

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[1] Chief of Police.

The second was a man of about forty to forty-five years of age, a lion-like figure with long hair flying wildly around his head, a genuinely Russian physiognomy with a defiant, energetic expression. There was something distinguished and imposing about the man's entire appearance; his demeanour and gestures, in stark contrast to the sad plight of a convict, revealed that peculiar air characteristic of high Russian society. This was evident even in the way he wore his unflattering clothes and in his choice of them; for although they were hardly inferior to those of the other exiles and natives in terms of disarray and grime, they were nevertheless made of the finest fabrics. Over a dark-green cloth tunic he wore a fur coat made of that semish leather, the superb craftsmanship of which is the main—or almost the only—industry of the inhabitants of Irkutsk, lined with Siberian fox, and a matching cap reaching down over his cheeks. A Chinese shawl of red silk tied the fur coat around his hips, and on his back he carried a janczarki, the long Tatar musket, alongside a bow and arrow.

Between these two men one could glimpse a figure such as one would scarcely
in these desolate wilds, beneath this gloomy sky and so far from the frontiers of European civilisation.
[299]

It was a young girl of about nineteen, the granddaughter of the holova or village headman, the old Frenchman, as the exile had described him earlier in his brief conversation with the clergyman.

Indeed, the civil head of the colony – the colonists in Siberia have the right to elect him from among the so-called Crown peasants – was by birth a son of beautiful and distant France. During the ill-fated retreat of the once-so-arrogant Napoleonic army from burning Moscow through the winter horrors of 1812, he – then a young soldier of barely twenty – had fallen into the hands of the Cossacks and been dragged as a prisoner of war to the farthest east of the vast empire. Like so many others, he had been forgotten in distant Siberia following the handover of prisoners after the Treaty of Paris; his relatives back home had long since presumed him dead, and he had later been compelled by various twists of fate—which we may yet have occasion to describe in more detail—to refrain from taking any further steps to secure his freedom, all the more so as he had married the daughter of a native, one of the most respected Tungus chieftains.

However, this marriage had lasted only a few years. Of the children his wife
had left him, only one daughter had survived: the mother of the girl who now stood beside him and to whom he devoted all his love and care. For his daughter, [300]
who had married a distinguished exiled Russian who, together with the ill-fated poet Bestuzhev, had played a prominent role in the Pestel conspiracy of 1825, which so bloodily consolidated the throne of Tsar Nicholas, and who, following the execution of the ringleaders, had been pardoned along with 83 conspirators and sent to Siberia, and after serving her katurga[1] was sent to the posieleniec[2] in the wilds between the Lena and Okhotsk –

(1) Forced labour.

[2] Exile.

had died ten years earlier, along with her husband, from one of the vicious Siberian fevers. *Jeanrenaud*, as the old Frenchman called himself, had moved to the colony with his children, and, not wishing to be separated from his daughter's grave, had remained there. His calm, dignified demeanour and the influence he wielded over the nomadic tribes through his earlier marriage had earned him the trust not only of the settlers but even of the Russian officials, and so, by virtue of his status as a Crown settler or freeholder, he had been appointed head of the isolated outpost.

However much he wished to place his beloved granddaughter—the only bond that still tied him to life—in happier circumstances more suited to her future, his tenderness towards her and other circumstances had so far prevented him from parting with her and sending her to St Petersburg or some other suitable place for her upbringing. And so year after year had passed, and the child had grown into a young woman

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who, in this wild and grubby atmosphere, had blossomed into a strange flower.

Holowa, who had enjoyed a fine and refined education in his youth, had endeavoured to apply this to the upbringing of his granddaughter, in whose veins French and Tatar blood mingled so strangely; but his tenderness towards her had, alas, also prevented him from applying the principles of a strict upbringing and from shielding her from the wild influences that surrounded her, to which he himself had succumbed.

Thus, despite her great natural gifts and an originally warm heart and sound sensibility, her character had soon become a lamentable mixture of wild, bold defiance, superstition, arrogance and capriciousness. Nevertheless, even amidst these terrible traits—and amidst an even more dreadful temptation, truly diabolical for such a young heart and such a disordered mind as the last two years had brought upon her—traits of a lofty and noble spirit and true femininity frequently came to the fore.

This strange creature was just as peculiar in her outward appearance.

Wéra Tungilbi – as she was known by her Russian and Tungusic names – was of medium height, slender yet strongly built, with a body hardened against all hardships and the effects of the climate. Beneath a thick head of blonde hair plaited into braids and her low forehead, a beautiful arch rose

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and boldly a short, aquiline nose arched above a mouth that was somewhat broad but nobly and fully formed. The chin was narrow and merged into a beautifully curved throat, which, together with the neck, resembled the powerful nape of a stag. The structure of the face did, however, tend towards the familiar Tartar-like shape of the cheekbones, yet without making an unpleasant impression; rather, it harmonised perfectly with the whole and with the distinctive shape of the eyes, which gave this face its remarkable expression. These eyes, owing to his ancestry, were small and slanted slightly towards the bridge of the nose, yet possessed such a fiery intensity that they seemed to sparkle, and few could bear his gaze without lowering their own eyes. This intensity was further heightened by the strange anomaly that, despite the blond colour of his hair, deep black, bushy eyebrows

shaded them with a high arch. Her feet and hands were exceedingly small and of an aristocratic shape. The young Siberian woman wore a rich, fanciful outfit, such as the women of the people from whom her grandmother hailed are fond of. It was like that of the men, made of hides and furs, though of the most precious kind, and consisted of a short women's skirt reaching just above the knees, made of white ermine fur, boots made of reindeer hide, and a matching Yakut overgarment of precious sable fur, fantastically adorned with coloured glass beads, silk, horsehair and goat's hair, with the rough side facing outwards. Although this coat or fur was, according to Yakut
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custom, the beautiful semi-wild woman nevertheless wore the 'Handi'—the distinctive apron made of yellow-tanned leather, reaching to mid-loins and fringed at the bottom, which both men and women hung from a cord around their necks and which filled the gap in the tight outer garment. Thick fur gloves and a fur-lined bashlik of red cloth wrapped around her head and neck completed this wild, yet by no means unattractive, costume. In her hand, the beauty carried a small, roughly carved crossbow fitted with a sharp steel band, and attached to the belt of her coat was a quiver of blunt bolts, a knife in a sheath of fish skin, and a small American revolver about the length of her hand. Hanging over her shoulder from a light strap were dainty, long snowshoes, covered with the fur of a reindeer calf.

Wéra Tungilbi immediately approached the clergyman and held out her hand to him.
'You see, Father,' she said in French, 'that I was right when I said we could set off together. Number Nine Hundred and Eighty must have had some very interesting things to tell you, for his confession to have taken so long!'

'Do not mock a man in misfortune, my child,' said the priest gravely, turning towards his sledge, as if wishing to avoid further conversation. 'What better consolation could he have found for the long, hard moons that lie ahead for him and all the inhabitants of this sad wasteland, than that the Lord God would
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sins and that the saints will strengthen him to bear his sufferings!"

'A warm bearskin,' remarked the girl's companion scornfully, 'would do more for that than all the saints in the calendar! A hearty swig of brandy is a better remedy for 40 degrees Réaumur than all the absolution in the world!'

'Be silent, wretch!' said the priest angrily, 'You are blaspheming against God, who has led you, like him, into this wasteland as punishment for your sins!'

'Nonsense!' laughed the exile scornfully. 'The Tsar in St Petersburg or the Governor-General of Irkutsk must have been your Lord and Master, who sent us here as punishment for our stupidity! I didn't think that a man like Nine Hundred and Eighty, after all he's been through, would still cling to those nursery tales about God and religion!'

The girl laughed brightly when she saw the horrified expression on the priest's face at this blasphemy, whilst the aged Holowa listened with a grim, displeased look, yet without daring to rebuke his housemate, towards whom he seemed to feel a certain fear.

'Holy Virgin!' cried the priest in horror, raising his hands – 'So that, wretched child, is why you hesitated yesterday to partake of the blessings of our holy

religion?! What evil seed has fallen into your ear since I last visited this place! And you, Jeanrenaud, how could you tolerate this blasphemer against God and man poisoning a young mind that should be receiving the blessings of the Christian
[305]
baptism, and for which you are accountable to the saints?'

The old man turned away grimly, without giving an answer. The girl herself, however, took it upon herself to reply.

'I have outgrown my childhood, Father Hilarius,' she said proudly and defiantly, 'and I thank this gentleman for freeing my mind from all the shackles of superstition. I did not wish to offend you, which is why I remained silent yesterday and put up with all the frippery of your church, which is no longer mine and no better than the magic incantations of my dear relatives, the Tungus! I am a free woman; I am my own god, and in the name of morality I reject yours! I believe in nothing but my five senses, and I deny the legitimacy of any religion whatsoever in the name of the rights of free humanity!"

The man at her side motioned for her to be silent and whispered a few words of warning to her, but the priest made the sign of the cross, as if to protect himself from these appalling teachings of nihilism, which were being confronted so brazenly for the first time, and turned to the onlookers—two or three of whom were still his penitents—as if to address them; but Holowa's housemate beat him to it.

'Silence!' he said in a commanding tone – 'We respect your convictions; honour ours! You have fulfilled your duty here and have no further business here until next year. Climb into the sledge and make your way away, or I shall report to the Governor [306]
that you are attempting to convert people, which is strictly forbidden by law!"

The clergyman bowed his head at this threat, the grave consequences of which he knew only too well. As if in a daze, he staggered towards the sledge and allowed his penitent children to lift him into it; they then fell to their knees beside him to receive his final blessing. The Yakut took his place in the front seat and, with a drawn-out 'Je – tiah!', raised his long staff – the Cossacks shouted their *'Paszol!'* and brandished their kantchuh – and off trotted the dog team at a brisk trot, accompanied by the horsemen.

The exile turned to the girl with a laugh. 'Well then, Wéra Tungilbi, we've got rid of the man in the black coat, and before he returns, a great deal may have changed. Would you now be so kind as to join our hunting party?'

'I'm ready,' she said thoughtfully. 'Deep down, he meant well and is an honest man, even if he is one of those priests you've told me so many bad things about, Michaeloff! – Who will be accompanying us?'[«]

"Sergei, the Katori, and Ajun, the Yakut; he's already standing there with his spear and sack."

'Farewell, Diadiuszki![1] We'll be back this evening; don't let the time drag on and keep the samovar[2] warm!'

She offered her cheek to the old man, which he

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(1) Little Grandfather.

[2] Tea kettle.

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kissed sadly but tenderly, whilst impressing upon her various warnings and precautions, which he knew full well would be forgotten or ignored the moment she turned her back on the house. But when the exile tried to shake his hand before following those who had gone ahead, he turned away from him in displeasure.

‘No, Gospodin – I do not wish to take your hand,’ he said grimly, ‘for you are the worst enemy I have. You have led the child of my soul astray into wicked principles and torn all good and honourable feelings of love, obedience and piety from her heart, planting in their place the poison of your political hatred. You have just severed even the last bond of reverence for religion – God will one day punish you for this! But I curse the day I was forced to take you into my home.’

The Russian shrugged haughtily. ‘You are being childish, Monsieur Jeanrenaud! Your pretty granddaughter was not born to wither away in this corner of Siberia. Noble blood flows through her veins, and I hope to see her play a part once more on the dance floors of the Winter Palace. To that end, she must acquire some refinement and character, and you ought to thank me for deigning to provide her with these. As for the punishment of your God, you know that I fear Him no more than I fear the tin idols of the Tungus and Yakuts. The Governor of Irkutsk has, in
[308]
my eyes has more real power than all the gods of the civilised and uncivilised world. Goodbye, Papa Jeanrenaud!’

He walked away laughing towards the hills, at the foot of which the girl was already waiting impatiently for him.

‘Have you had another row with your father, Michael Ivanovich?’ she asked, holding out her foot—which, despite the bulky fur boots, was still small—to her companions so they could fasten the snowshoes to it.

‘Bah – it’s nothing, child! His usual complaints – that I’m spoiling your character because I take the trouble to banish those petty prejudices from your soul and open it up to a sublime, grand worldview, the realisation that man is not only his own god, but the true god of the world!’

She laughed light-heartedly. “A fine god, who as a child cannot even wash his own nappies, as a man must hunt sable and foxes, and as an old man has to be fed!”

‘And yet He is eternally renewed and rejuvenated. I speak not of the individual, but of the human race, the Lord of all that is visible and tangible—that is, of that which alone is true. I am delighted, Wéra Tungilbi, to be alone with you today, to strengthen your power and to paralyse the whisperings of that man in the black coat who wasted his arts on you yesterday. I observed with pleasure how little attention you paid to him, and that you did not even deem it worth the trouble
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to disappoint him regarding your convictions. All the more sharply, then, did the lesson from earlier strike home!’

The girl was already about to fly away on her soles—winged with wood and animal sinews instead of wings—but she paused again and looked up at him, leaning on the long, slender lance she had received from her companions' hands and which served as her staff, with a strange gaze in which a mixture of defiance and mischief was reflected.

'And why do you think, very wise Barîn,'[1] she asked, 'why I did not answer the poor Father Hilarius yesterday?"

'Because I have taught you to despise his nonsense!'

She laughed. "Far from it, noble boyar! I did it so that he might not be saddened sooner than necessary, and because he is the best and most respectable person I know, a hundred times better than you and I! So—and now catch me, Michael Ivanovich, if you can!"

And laughing, she flew at breakneck speed across the vast snowy expanse on that simple contraption which, in the Arctic zone, serves as the hunter's substitute for the steppe horse.

'She is and always will be a child,' said the exile resentfully, 'a nature that absorbs everything—the boldest ideas, the most important problems of prevailing philosophy—and in the very next moment forgets all these teachings to give free rein to the exuberance of her whims
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! – Women! Women! Swirling snowflakes in human nature, without substance or substance, and yet fertilising the earth!"

He slung the shotgun over his shoulder and hurried after her; her companions had already gone on ahead.

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About four hours had passed since they set off when we caught up with the party again.

They were camped in one of those wild valleys of the Stanoway Mountains, opening to the west – towards the vast snow-covered plain – beneath a protruding rock 'that sheltered them from the icy north wind. The Yakut and the Katurgi had cleared away the snow—which was only light here—and lit a fire in the hollow of the rock, the smoke from which wound its way round the overhanging rock and rose high into the clear air. A small kettle was boiling snow water on the embers to make tea, whilst beyond the immediate circle of the fire the cold was already reasserting its dominance.

Sergei, the Katurgi, a man of some forty years of age with a blunt Mongolian face, tended the kettle until the right moment to brew, in the samovar, the *kirpiczny czaj*, the so-called 'brick tea'—the lowest grade of tea, which arrives in Siberia from China baked in this form and must be cut into pieces with an axe or knife—whilst his companion, the Yakut, had gone out onto the plain at the behest of the European hunters to check the weather.
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Michailoff sat beneath the rock with the young Siberian woman, observing her with searching glances, whilst her gaze wandered absently, now resting on half a dozen sables and

[1] Lord!

ermine – the spoils of their hunt, lying at their feet – and then let her gaze wander over the Thalkes valley. The entrance to the valley was rather narrow – black masses of rock jutted out from the white snowdrifts, and at the spot where they sat, sheltered from the biting wind, a dark crevice or chasm opened up behind them, which seemed to lead deep into the rock.

'What are you thinking about, Wéra Tungilbi?' asked the exile.

"I was thinking about what will become of me if the pardon from Saint Petersburg arrives for you—which you have long been expecting—or if you secretly leave Katemskoi, as you have likewise long intended."

"You know that I have promised to take you with me, come what may,"

"No – that's precisely what I don't want! It would be a sad fate for me. Here, at least, I am my own mistress, but if I were to accompany you and depend solely on your favour, I would be little better than your slave; for I know you despise women!"

'You're being unfair to yourself,' said the exile. 'You're an exception amongst many, and my protégée. – I regard you as – as my daughter!'

She laughed defiantly in his face. "You are being untrue to your own principles, Mi-chael Ivanovich.

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Did you not teach me yourself that a person owes no duty of gratitude to their parents, that parents owe no debt to their child, and that the child's upbringing is the duty of society as a whole? In society, only contracts with mutual rights apply, and where is the judge who would compel you to honour such a contract with me?"

"Your own beauty and charm . . ."

'Bah – don't be silly, Michael Ivanovich! You can't possibly think that I'm inclined to repay your help with my body, and love . . . it is, as you yourself taught me, merely a weakness and the icing on the cake of sensual pleasure. Besides' – she laughed again, cheerfully and girlishly – 'I haven't yet found an opportunity to fall in love amongst the Yakuts, Tungus and Varneki. Mutin, the Cossack, is the only handsome lad who's courting me, and he reeks too much of brandy for my liking. I'm even less keen on marrying Horodiczny[1] Pisarev in Yakutsk, who's already asked my father for my hand twice. That scoundrel beat his first wife to death. If I ever sell myself to a man, he must be young, handsome and rich, and let me have my way in everything. Moreover, I prefer to have many young, rich and handsome men, to rule over them all and enjoy them, just as Tsarevna Catherine once did, the one you told me about. That is why

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I want to go to St Petersburg, or even to Paris, where it's supposed to be even more beautiful and free, as you say."

'But you'll never get there without me!'

"We'll see! – Look, Michael Ivanovich, you are a handsome man, more handsome than any other I have seen so far, and even if you are an 'unfortunate' man, you still have powerful friends; for even the Horodiczny and the Vice-Governor in Yakutsk

[1] Chief of Police.

do not treat you like the other convicts, and I know that you secretly receive money and letters. But there are still people who are more powerful than you, for they have punished you and are forcing you to live here and hunt sable, after you have seen all the beauties of the world and were a free man. So now you are a servant, a slave, no better than the servants of my grandfather, the Camel Prince. You must admit that it would be foolish of me to become attached to a servant, a man without freedom, and to obey him, when I can find plenty of princes and free men in the world! – I am indebted to you for your teachings and for showing me what rights a human being has, and how childish all my previous notions were – but I have repaid you for this with many other things since Smotrytiel[1] directed you to my grandfather's house. So there is no reason why I should sacrifice my future to you as well; for if we were both caught on the run, I would be condemned just as surely as you!«

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The teacher of these principles bit his lip. 'You have forgotten a key tenet of my teachings, Wéra,' he said. 'It is that the strength of human relationships lies in partnership on an equal footing. No one is obliged to render services to another that do not benefit them personally. But if their own advantage is involved, it would be foolish of them not to render them. By sharing the risk of my flight, you also stand to gain from its benefits. Your relatives will never agree to let you set out alone into the wide world; moreover, you would lack everything there, and, as a result of the absurd and unjust social institutions that still exist, a woman needs a man's support everywhere. You can see, then, that the advantage lies with you in accepting my offer.'

'How much money would I need to get from Okhotsk to Paris?' she said, without responding to his speech.

'A thousand silver roubles.'

'Show me your knife – the very one you brought back from the Caucasus, and which you took as spoils from Amru-Bey, the Circassian chieftain, after you had slain him. I know you always carry it with you when you go hunting.'

The exile loosened the shawl wrapped around his fur coat and drew a Circassian dagger from the belt around his overcoat, which he handed to her in surprise. The

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metal hilt was set with several precious stones – some of which had fallen out in places.

The Siberian woman placed her finger on a stone that served as the pommel. "These are precious stones, as you told me, the sort with which women and the nobility of the land adorn themselves in Europe. What do you call this one?"

"It is a Siberian emerald."

'So such stones are also found in our cold country?'

'Right here. The mountains of Siberia yield, in addition to precious metals, emeralds, sapphires, amethysts, topazes, hyacinths and the precious phemakite, not only in the Urals, but

[1] Inspector.

even in the quarries of Nerchinsk. Siberia, so foolishly maligned in Europe, strangely enough harbours the richest treasures in its bosom. But why do you ask?"

'I don't recognise the names you've just mentioned. There may well be such stones among them. But tell me, how much is this stone here on the pommel of your knife worth?'

'The Chinese merchant Tali Thingh in Okhotsk would gladly pay two hundred roubles for it. Perhaps I shall tempt him in the spring.'

"And if a stone is twice or three times as large, does its value increase accordingly?"

'Not in the proportion you suggest, but ten or twenty times as much. But once again, why are you asking such questions, which must be of little concern to you in this desolate place?' [316]

Vera Tungilbi had taken off her thick fur gloves, reached into the pocket of her ermine coat and produced an object, which she handed to the exile. It was a stone in the shape of a columnar crystal, about 1½ inch long and ½ inch thick. When the Russian turned it over in his hand, the glow of the fire lit by the Katurgi fell upon it, and the stone sparkled like the green eye of a snake.

The exile examined it in amazement from all sides and then looked up at its owner:

'In the devil's name, girl, how did you come by this stone? As far as I can see, it is an emerald of the finest colour and considerable value!'

"Then tell me this, Michael Ivanovich!"

"I'm no jeweller, but I'd be very much mistaken if this stone weren't worth two or three thousand roubles!"

The Siberian woman clapped her hands like a child. "*Druzno! Druzno!*"[1] she cried. "I'll have my Diadiuszki give it to me as a present, and then I'll definitely go to Paris!"

"From your grandfather? Is this stone the Holowa's property, then?"

'Goodness *me, my friend!*[2] He knows nothing about it at all. They belong to Scheminge Tojon,[3] the Prince of Ka-meel, my other little grandfather.'

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"It – you're talking about this stone here!"

'*No, no!* He gave me a whole little bagful to look after, many of them far more beautiful and much larger than this one here – there are at least a hundred of them. The old man says he found them in the mountains by the Amur under a tree root[4] and kept them in his yurt for many, many years. He reckons women like to dress up, and he's set them aside especially for my Ischi[5]!'

The exile had risen from his seat in a fluster. "If you're telling the truth, girl, then you're in possession of a fortune more than princely. Why haven't you told me about this long ago?"

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[1] Funny!

[2] My friend.

[3] Tojon or Tonjon is the name given to the chieftains, the princes of the Tungus.

[4] In 1850, a farmer near Yekaterinburg found the most precious emeralds beneath the roots of a fir tree felled by a storm; this led to the discovery of a rich emerald mine by *Kokowin*, the director of the gem-cutting workshops.

[5] The bride's dowry among the Tungus.

‘What was I to do – I hadn’t even thought of it until yesterday, when I was rummaging through my mother’s red box[1] and happened to find the leather pouch again. Then I remembered the stone I’d seen on your knife, and I decided to ask you.’

‘So the Tungus and Yakuts’ tale of Scheminga’s wealth is no fable after all,’ remarked the Russian, deep in thought. ‘Be careful not to speak to anyone else about this treasure until I have
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how we might make use of it! – In any case, you must keep it – best of all, you should give it to me for safekeeping!”

‘He’ll give them to me if I ask him to,’ said the Siberian woman simply, ‘but until then they’re his property and I have no claim to them. It’s wrong of you, Mikhail Ivanovich, to try to turn me into a thief!’

“Fool! The old nomad knows nothing but his camels and horses and doesn’t appreciate the value of these gemstones. How often have I told you that every person has an equal right to ownership? But here comes Ajun running at full speed, and whilst we’re arguing here, the weather has changed.”

Indeed, the small figure of the Yakut, wrapped in reindeer hide, came running from the entrance to the little valley in hurried, goat-like leaps, already trying from a distance to attract the attention of his companions by waving his arms about in all sorts of ways.

‘What’s the matter, Socha[2]? What has roused you from your usual lethargy?’

‘He’ll catch up with them before they’re in the shelter of the mountains, Gospodin. The evil spirit will have their souls before the sun goes down!’

“Who on earth is going to take yours, you son of a bitch!” [319]

‘*Rass – dwa – pät* – schest[3] is what I’ve counted!’ groaned the Yakut.

“One, two – five, six! What do you mean by that? Answer, or I’ll need the boot!” The Yakut fell to his knees before the stern interrogator. “Father, most gracious one, why do you wish to strike poor Ajun, simply because his eye is like that of a falcon, and he has seen six sledges on the plain!”

“Sledges? May they be damned! What do we care about some wandering horde of your rabble!”

“But the Buran[4] will kill them.”

‘The Buran?’

‘It’s coming across the tundra, Gospodin – before long you’ll hear its roar.’ The girl had been listening intently. More determined and eager to help than the
man, she turned to the katorgi:

‘Sergei – stoke the fire so the smoke grows darker and they can find their way. Give me your glass, Gospodin!’

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[1] These wooden crates, painted blue and red and fitted with black-lacquered oak fittings, are made in Steviaask and are shipped in large quantities every year via Irbit to all parts of Siberia.

[2] The Yakuts call themselves Socha’s; they acquired the name ‘Yakuts’ from the Russians through an initial confusion with the Yakuyirs.

[3] One – two – five – six.

[4] Snowstorm.

He handed her a small telescope. ‘What do you want with that, Wéra Tungilbi?’

Without answering him, she flew towards the entrance to the valley and climbed the rock, from which she had a sweeping view of the endless snow-covered expanse.
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The nomads of these barren steppes have remarkably keen hearing and sight. The Yakut had seen with his naked eye what Wéra could now only make out through the telescope as sledges moving rapidly across the plain in the distance. Various small details in the formation of the Narty convoy also led her to realise that it could not simply be locals who had undertaken the arduous journey.

However, she had little time to continue her observations, for the atmosphere was thickening extremely rapidly, and when she lowered the telescope, raised her eyes and scanned the horizon, she realised with horror, from experience, just how true the Yakut’s words were.

An eerie hissing and whistling sound came from the north, from the direction of the Arctic Ocean, sweeping across the plain; and just as a whirlwind in the desert drives the dust before it, or a storm surge is preceded by the spray of the waves, so it crackled and moved across the vast snow-covered expanse—a long, great wave of swirling crystals. The whole expanse suddenly seemed to come to life and rise up. Behind this wave rolling across the ground, however, it rose like a high wall reaching up to the zenith, drawing ever closer—myriads of moving atoms, and yet like a compact, gigantic black mass.

In the blink of an eye, night had fallen and the sun, already nearing the horizon after the brief daylight hours, had vanished completely. The air was filled with howling and whistling, and
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an icy draught, deadly to all life, formed, as it were, the vanguard of the storm.

It was the dreadful snowstorm of northern Siberia, whose effects resemble the desert’s samum and the cyclone of the China Sea.

At that moment, Vera felt the grip of a strong hand on her arm.

‘You fool – do you intend to expose yourself defencelessly to the fury of the storm? Down into the shelter of the rocks – it is our only salvation!’

It was the exile who had followed her and was now pulling her away from the dangerous spot. She followed quickly, for she recognised the danger and the futility of lingering in that exposed place.

As she hurried the few steps across the valley floor towards its northern wall, the air was already filled with crackling snow dust, which lashed their faces like sharp needles. Wéra noticed dark figures darting past them along the ground, and now and then a whistling sound or a frightened snort mingled with the howling and roaring of the storm.

The glow of a burning torch, which the Katorgi was brandishing, showed them the way to the cave or crevice into which their two hunting companions had already retreated, and in the next moment they were beside them. The refuge where they now found themselves was admittedly not very spacious, but it afforded them sufficient shelter, as the cavity was a good five to six

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steps into the mountainside and was covered by an overhanging mass of rock.

This meant they were at least protected on three sides and from above from the swirling masses of snow and, given the direction of the storm, from its fury, even though the whirlwind swirling in the valley hollow hurled some of the snowflakes at them.

Incidentally, the Siberian woman had scarcely felt herself to be safe when her complete calm and composure returned, and, leaning against the rock face, she watched this terrible upheaval of nature with a certain delight. The Yakut's Katorgie and Ajun had laid the burning embers they had brought to safety at the back of the cave and were keeping the flame alight with dry reindeer dung and moss that had been piled up here by the wandering hordes, whilst the exile had positioned himself broadly in front of it to shield it from the storm's fury with his mighty frame. The storm was now truly terrifying. All the demons of the air seemed to have been unleashed and were performing their wild dance in the valley basin, whilst high up in the skies, above the low hills and rock faces, the wind whistled and howled as if from a thousand packs of wolves. The snow swirled past the entrance to the grotto in such dense ice crystals that it seemed sealed off as if by a wall. From behind this wall, Wéra, who had taken shelter behind a small ledge, thought she could see fiery eyes flashing as they lurked on the ground, and the fearful whimpering that reached her ears amidst the roar of the storm,
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convinced her that these were indeed fugitive animals from the snow steppe, which had sought shelter here from the gale and found their refuge already occupied by humans. She was just about to approach Michaeloff to mention this to him—for the raging storm was already rendering every word unintelligible from a distance of just a few paces—when she was suddenly prevented from doing so by an incident.

It was indeed a startling sight; for as she looked in the dim half-light of the fire, a large black mass, round as a ball, tumbled down from the rock forming the ceiling of the shelter in front of the entrance onto the ground, rolled about there, and then slowly raised itself, growling and snorting.

The greenish eyes of a large black bear—which had probably sought out this crevice in the rock as its usual winter lair and refuge—sparkled at her. It was by no means the first time that the young, courageous huntress had confronted and killed this sole specimen of big game from the Siberian snow-steppes – as evidenced by two mighty pelts in old Holowa's house – but on those occasions she had been armed with a good rifle and well prepared. Nevertheless, even under these unfavourable circumstances, the bold girl did not lose her resolve and simply struggled to free her small revolver from its tightly buttoned pocket.

A deep, resonant growl from the Black Man, who
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had tumbled headlong down the valley slope, fleeing the fury of the blizzard, and found his refuge so unexpectedly occupied—but was particularly startled by the light of the fire, which he found repulsive, and was in doubt as to whether he should pounce on his guests or rather expose himself to the fury of the weather—only now caused the men by the fire to look up and Michaeloff to glance around.

The Yakut immediately began – out of the great respect his people feel for the bear, which they regard as the embodiment of an evil spirit – though this by no means prevents them, when the opportunity arises, from skinning it and devouring its haunches and ribs with fabulous gluttony – to perform all manner of strange bows and contortions in the presence of the unwelcome guest and to welcome him with all manner of honorary titles. Sergei reached for the short axe in his belt and uttered a barbaric Russian curse – but the exile seized the hunting spear that had been leaning against the rock face, as his shotgun was out of reach, raised the weapon to thrust and leapt forward.

Unfortunately, he had not calculated the hasty leap properly, or had slipped whilst making it – in short, the broad, harpoon-like blade of the spear did not strike the beast's chest squarely, but only its side beneath the right front paw, cutting through fur and flesh in a wide and painful but not fatal wound, and emerging through the back. However, the force of the thrust and the man's strength were so great,

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that he – finding no further resistance – crashed his own body against that of the bear and tumbled to the ground with it.

Master Petz immediately tried to wrap his arms round his opponent, rolling about with him on the ground. At first, his sturdy clothing protected the exile from any injury, but although he took the precaution of immediately seizing the beast's throat with his left fist and pressing its throat upwards, his right hand was unable to free itself sufficiently from the bear's embrace to grasp his Circassian dagger, and even his great strength would scarcely have been enough to keep the beast's teeth away from his own throat any longer, had not another hand intervened to help.

It was the young Siberian woman who, with admirable composure, once she had finally undone the buckles of her revolver and freed it, approached the combatants and, seizing a favourable moment, held the barrel to the bear's ear and fired the shot.

However weak the weapon may have been, the bullet still had sufficient force to pierce the beast's skull; instantly its paws went limp and it writhed on the ground in death throes, which were soon brought to an end by a few blows from the convict's axe.

Meanwhile, the exile straightened up, tested his limbs and offered his hand to the girl. 'I probably owe you my life, Wéra Tungilbi,'

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he said in a deep voice that reached her ears even through the roar of the storm,

'and Michael Bakunin will not forget it and hopes to be able to repay you for this favour one day!'

It was indeed the famous agitator, the mysterious revolutionary and propagandist of Slavism, who in this remote corner of Siberia – not the bloody drama of Dresden or the November Days in Berlin, – perhaps not even the famous and

notorious speech to the Polish émigrés in Paris on the anniversary of the Warsaw Revolution[1], but, as it was said, was atoning for his disobedience, first in the Caucasus and then with a scathing epigram against the Tsar at his present place of exile.

But the girl paid no heed whatsoever to her mentor's mood.

'Nonsense, Michael Ivanovich,' she said with a laugh, 'that would be completely contrary to your principles; gratitude is a folly, and the person who imposes it upon themselves is thereby tying a rod around their own waist, which in the long run only embitters them towards their creditor. Whatever help I gave was out of pure self-interest; for if the bear had devoured you, I would have lost a good companion and teacher, not to mention the danger that he might have turned on us afterwards. So no talk of merit or gratitude, Michael Ivanovich.

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Ajun has a better grasp of self-interest, for I believe he is keen to roast over the fire the piece he has cut from his friend, and unless all signs are deceiving, the Buran has already done its worst and is subsiding in its fury.'

Indeed, the howling and whistling of the receding storm began to subside, though it still roared with such ferocity in the valley and out on the open plain that no living creature could have withstood it. After half an hour, however, the swirling snow—whipped into a veritable dust of ice—began to transform into a dense flurry of flakes.

'By all the evil spirits of my venerable relatives of Tunga,' said the Siberian woman, 'instead of the Buran bringing a bright Northern Lights display and a few degrees of extra cold, as it usually does, it is giving us a proper Burany[2], which could last for twenty-four hours. That will make it very difficult for us to track down those poor lads.'

'Who are you talking about?'

'Well, who else but the sledges we saw earlier. They must be buried up to their necks in snow by now, and unless they have a very experienced guide, they'll never find their way here or to the colony in this blizzard. But I think I've memorised the direction precisely, and Ajun is a reliable tracker!' [328]

'For heaven's sake, girl! Surely you're not thinking of going out in this hellish weather to look for that Yakut rabble? Let them go to hell in all four winds and perish!'[3]

"Of course I will!"

"But I won't allow it! I'll hold you back by force!"

"You?"

'Yes!'

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[1] 1847; it caused a huge sensation and was disseminated throughout Europe in translation.

[2] A fierce snowstorm.

[3] *Stupaj kczortu, na czetyre wiatry, sztob ty zdoch!* 'Go to the devil in all four winds and die!' A very common curse.

The Siberian woman laughed mockingly in his face, then turned to her two other companions. ‘Take your axe, Sergei, and you take your spear, Ajun! – You’ve heard what I intend to do; I hope you’ll accompany me!’

‘Wherever you go, Gospodina,’ said the katorgi, ‘whether a wretched fellow like me dies in the yurt on his felt bed or here in the snow, it makes no difference. But no one shall stop you from doing as you please. I’ve had the misfortune to kill two people and have therefore been sentenced to katorga – but the Tsar is just and will not punish me more severely, even if there’s one more!»

‘You hear that, Michael Ivanovich,’ the girl continued with a laugh. ‘Ajun would run that lance right through your body from behind, the one you were using just now

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missed the bear just now, if you were to engage in combat with my other bearded knight over there. You know I’m headstrong and won’t let myself be forced. But stay here – you’ll have a fire with roast bear, and when the Purgy[1] is over, I’ll have my personal Cossack fetch you – provided we ourselves return home safely!”

‘If you’re foolish enough to risk your life, I certainly won’t stay behind like a coward!’

“*Charoscho!*[2] I knew it! I see, Ajun, you’ve finished skinning it!

Right – take it with you, we might need it, and hang the two legs round Sergei’s neck – those paws are a treat for Grandad. The rest can be left for the wolves and foxes lurking outside, eagerly awaiting our departure. Put the sable in the sack – there – are you ready?”

“*There you go*, Gospodina!”[3]

“When we last saw the sledges, they couldn’t have been much more than four versts[4] away. You’ll find the way, won’t you, Ajun?”

“*There*, Gospodina! Unless the blizzard has caused them to veer off course.”

“That’s what Michaeloff has his rifle for, and he’ll fire it from time to time. Onwards then, Ajun, stretch out the

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spear back so we can hold on to it and not lose sight of one another!”

Such an aid was indeed necessary, for the snowstorm was so thick that one could not see more than two paces to the side. Once everyone had put their snowshoes back on—less to make rapid progress over the fresh snow than to sink into it as little as possible—the Yakut grasped the still-bloody tip of his 5- to 6-foot-long spear and stepped out into the snowstorm. The other three followed, clinging to the shaft.

The short trek through the valley to its exit was relatively easy, as the rocky and hilly slopes provided a clear direction. But once the small hunting party had left the shelter of these features, the undertaking they had embarked upon proved to be as daring as it was difficult.

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[1] Like ‘Burany’: a heavy snowstorm.

[2] Very good! – Russian.

[3] Yes, madam.

[4] Seven versts = 1 German mile.

For anyone other than the natives, who were accustomed to such phenomena and endowed with extraordinary acuity of sight and hearing, it would have been impossible to maintain a straight course through this dense tangle of snowflakes, which within a few minutes had transformed the four people into moving mounds of snow. However, upon emerging from the valley, before continuing on his way, the Yakut had carefully observed the direction of the drifting flakes, and now crossed it at a precise angle, without hesitating for even a moment along the way. From time to time, a boulder, shrouded in snow and emerging from the white, ceaselessly shifting wall all around him, seemed to him

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– such as the many that still lay scattered across the plain near the mountains – to serve as a guide.

Whilst the blizzard would have made it impossible for the hunters to proceed, on the one hand due to its terrible force, which would have knocked them to the ground, and on the other hand by the sharpness of the snow whipped up into icy dust, which falls like a thousand needle tips upon every exposed part of the skin and penetrates even through thick clothing – the burany, in this respect, presented fewer obstacles to them; for although the dense tangle of snowflakes blinded their eyes and covered every limb, it could not hinder their movements.

Nevertheless, the daring hunters made only slow progress, and it required all their hardiness and physical strength to continue the undertaking they had begun. They must have advanced in this manner for about half an hour when the Yakut stopped and urged the outcast to take a shot.

Michaeloff had carefully wrapped the lock of his shotgun in reindeer hide to protect it from the damp; he now had the girl and Sergei hold it over the lock and pulled the trigger.

To everyone’s delight, the gun did not fail either, and the shot rang out. All four listened intently for a reply, but all around them remained silent.

‘We cannot possibly be at the spot where the blizzard must have caught up with the sledges yet,’

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explained the courageous huntress. “First, reload your shotgun, Mikhail Ivanovich, and then let us carry on.”

The first task, however, was by no means as easy as the second, as it was achieved only with great difficulty in the dense blizzard, which was dampening the gunpowder.

As soon as the shotgun was loaded, the small party hurried on their way again, for any unnecessary delay could easily spell death for them all.

They had probably made their way for another 15 minutes or so when the Yakut stopped once more and explained that they had already passed the point where they would have encountered the sledge had it continued its journey towards the valley for as long as possible.

The exile immediately tried to fire his shotgun – but the gun misfired; the gunpowder had become damp.

After a brief consultation, all four raised their voices as loudly as possible and then listened intently.

For a while, everything remained silent – then suddenly Ajun pricked up his ears.

‘What do you hear, man?’

‘There’s a sound in the air apart from the rustling of the snow,’ said the nomad, ‘but I can’t tell which way it’s coming from.’

‘The snow is getting in the way,’ said the girl hastily. ‘There, Michaeloff and you, Sergei, take the bear’s pelt and spread it out as a canopy. If Ajun
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crawls underneath it, he won’t be disturbed by the snow and will be able to focus his senses better. Then join your voices together once more.”

The advice was followed immediately – Ajun crawled under the makeshift tent roof and the other three let out together the drawn-out cry with which the Poworotschiks[1] usually urge on their team, whilst the girl fired her revolver twice.

A few moments later, the Yakut leapt to his feet and stretched out his arm. ‘As surely as Kuchta[2] may grant me a good fur hunt this winter – Ajun heard it clearly: a human being – a dog!’

‘Thanks be to God and the saints,’ cried the girl involuntarily – forgetting, in the elation and excitement of the moment, the dreadful tenets of atheism –
‘so we’re not too late! – Onwards, onwards!’

The Yakut strode ahead in haste, the others following. It was as though the discovery had also broken the power of the snowfall, for the flakes were now falling less thickly, which was a great relief given the darkness that had long since set in. They had scarcely walked two hundred paces in the new direction when they came upon a solid mass buried in the snow; at the same time, from the left came the faint but now clearly audible call of a human voice.
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The Promyschlenniki[3] hurried over and, in the very next moment, heard the following words spoken in English: ‘Damn me, you treacherous scoundrels, if I don’t put a bullet through the skull of the first one who comes here with thieving intentions. At least one of us is still capable of punishing you!’

The exile laughed. ‘Calm down, sir, whoever you may be and whatever you may be complaining about!’ he said, also in English. ‘You’ve probably never seen those who are coming here in your life, and yet they have the best of intentions to help you. Where on earth are you, sir?’

‘Where else would I be but here, beneath this double layer of wolf fur,’ said a man who now rose before the fur-trappers’ eyes from a snowdrift, which immediately revealed itself to be a snow-covered basket sledge with furs draped over it. “Or do you perhaps think I take any pride in freezing to death? – But *damned it!* If you really are helpers in times of need, then first check on my travelling companions, of whom I’ve heard nothing for the past hour.”

“Do have a sip of brandy yourself first, sir!”

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[1] The Yakuts, who transport goods on horseback and by sledge.

[2] The principal deity of the Yakuts.

(3) Fur trappers.

"*No!* – I'm certainly no follower of Father Matthew, but I know only too well how dangerous that is in this situation!"

"Not now that we're with you. But who are [335]
you, how did you end up in this wilderness, and who are your travelling companions?"

'As for me, that's easy enough to say. It seems I belong to the class of mad Englishmen, for, *very well*, only someone like that could have thought of taking a pleasure trip to your charming country and letting himself be dragged about by a scholar who is perhaps even madder, amongst the Samoyeds and Yukayirs, in Novaya Zemlya and other pleasant favourite haunts of polar bears and blue foxes, simply to discover a deviation of the magnetic needle—or rather, the North Pole itself. In other words, I am Lord *Frederik Walpole* and, for my own amusement, I've put a bullet through the skulls of a few polar bears whilst my companion was searching for mammoth bones. We've just come up from the lower Lena and are heading for Olensk—that is, if we haven't all frozen to death by then! *Damn it*, that remark brings me round to talking about my companions. As I said, they are a German professor and our shared servant and interpreter, a Russian from Arkhangelsk. They must be lying in the next two sledges, if that devilish whirlwind of yours – Buran, is that what you call it? – has actually left them on the ground at all!'

'We'll go and check straight away. In the meantime, My Lord, do carry on your discussion with this lady; she doesn't yet understand English, but apart from her mother tongue she speaks French and a little Italian!'

"A lady? – *la dame blanche? By Jove!* And [336]
you leave a gentleman lying there like a piece of wood in the presence of such a learned Yakut lady?" – He tried with all his might to pull himself up from his seated position, but had to content himself with a few attempts, for his limbs were completely stiff and unsteady. When he finally managed – at a nod from the girl and with the help of the Kator-gi – to get to his feet, he shook himself like a bear emerging from the water, stamped his feet and flapped his arms to get his sluggish blood flowing again.

As far as the darkness allowed him to make out, the Lord was still a fairly young man, tall and slender, wrapped in a reindeer pelt. Even now he was still holding the pistol with which he had earlier threatened the helpers.

'A lady? – *Very well!* I'd like to know how people in this country actually distinguish men from women? But madame, if you, white figure of snow, are truly a French-speaking woman, tell me first of all, how did Saul come to be counted among the prophets?'

The beautiful Siberian woman, who had been listening to the exchange with great interest, even though she only half understood it, had no time to answer the question addressed to her in French, for from the second sledge, some ten paces away, came a cry from the exile. 'Come here, My Lord, your companion has frozen to death!'
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Within a few moments, they were all gathered at the spot. The young, light-hearted lord, who had taken his own danger so lightly, showed the greatest concern and a warm, sympathetic heart at the misfortune of his travelling companion.

The latter, a small man of about fifty, lay buried beneath his sledge, which the blizzard had overturned. This circumstance, however, although the stranger showed no sign of life when first found, had probably been his salvation; for as the rescuers attended to him further, Michaeloff recognised from the faint heartbeat that all life had not yet fled him. They therefore attempted to pour some brandy down the frozen man's throat through his clenched teeth, and Sergei and the Lord set about rubbing his limbs, whilst the others continued their search.

There was no sign of the interpreter who had been travelling in the third sledge – he must either have fled with the Yakut guides or perished whilst attempting to save himself alone in the snowstorm. By all appearances, the Yakuts, who had been guiding the travellers from the Lena, had shamefully abandoned them when the blizzard struck and had tried to save themselves and their dogs alone, for the leather straps with which the valiant animals had been pulling the sledges had been cut, and the dogs had vanished with the treacherous drivers.

Following these findings from their investigation, [338]
everyone gathered once more round the scholar's sledge, where the zealous efforts of the Katurgi—who was mercilessly rubbing his charge with snow—seemed truly to be bringing him back to life. The half-dead man opened his eyes, stammered a few words about the mammoth's tiny cerebrum, and then slipped back into a lethargic state.

'Damn this situation!' cried the exile. 'We can't possibly leave the man lying here – but how are we to get him away?'

"The sledge is light," remarked Wéra, "we'll throw out everything we don't need and pull him ourselves all the way to the colony. How far are we from it, Ajun, and in which direction does it lie?"

The Yakut scratched his fur cap sheepishly. "Oh, mistress," he muttered, "Ajun is no shaman who knows everything. The wind has died down, and with all the comings and goings of the strangers, it was hard to keep our bearings. 'The Holowa might live over there,' he pointed in one direction, and then in the opposite one, 'but it could just as easily be over there! – If only the Socha's had left the dogs behind, they'd surely lead us to the fire.'

The exile let out a fierce curse. "Damn those dogs and the mothers of those dogs! What are we to do? – We'll all freeze to death!"

The Englishman asked what the matter was.

'The dogs?' he said – 'but I think they must [339]

still be on my sledge. We'd seen smoke in the distance on the mountains and thought we'd come across the station there, when the first signs of the storm took us by surprise. The animals refused to move forward; our team came to a halt, and I saw the musher running over to the others to consult with them. Then everyone hurried to their sledges, and immediately afterwards I heard the call of Wassili, our interpreter. I saw how the Yakut who was leading the dogs in front of my sledge was busy cutting them loose from the harness. I shouted at him to desist and, when he persisted in his mischievous treachery, threatened him with my pistol, whereupon he fled. At that very moment, the blizzard caught up with us and it howled and raged around us as if all the spirits of hell had been unleashed—the likes of which I had never experienced on any of my sea voyages—and as if it intended to lift us, along with the sledge, up into the air. The storm had scarcely passed when this dreadful snow whirlwind set in, which prevented me from seeing more than three paces ahead. In vain I called out to my companions and tried to reach them – in the end, I had no choice but to take refuge under the reindeer-skin blanket on the sledge, lest I perish myself!"

'Let's go and see for ourselves straight away,' said the exile. 'Hey – Ajun – where's the first sledge?"

"Here, Gospodin!"

"Check carefully to see if all the dogs have gone?"

The Yakut let out a shrill whistle – a whimper answered him; delighted, he leapt towards the spot.
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"Here, Gospodin! Kuchta doesn't want his children to perish in this weather! There are two dogs lying under the snow!"

The two poor animals, which, out of fear of the Lord's threat to the Yakut guide, had been unable to free themselves from the long strap serving as a drawbar, had buried themselves deep beneath the snow, which had arched into mounds above them, so that they had remained undiscovered when the sledge was first found. Ajun soon brought them to their feet with a few blows. Then he took some Jukola's[1] from his pocket and let them eat them, which completely restored their strength and cheerfulness. A brief consultation was enough to decide on the party's next steps. The German professor's sledge was cleared of everything except the professor himself—all the rest being a jumble of antediluvian bones, fossils and other curiosities—whilst the unfortunate scholar, in a semi-conscious state, muttered a few sentences about spheroids, degree measurement and Tertiary formations, though this did nothing to persuade his rescuers to spare his cabinet pieces. He was then covered with the furs at hand; the hastily knotted leather tow rope was attached to the sledge, which the two exiles, Wéra and the Lord—who had put on his snowshoes—took hold of; and then the Yakut set about putting the two dogs on a lead, after
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he had repeatedly rubbed their noses with the inside of his grubby apron. His shout immediately set the animals in motion, and as they had no load to pull, they trotted lightly into the snowy wilderness, whilst the party, clinging to the guide

[1] Dried fish.

and pulling the sledge behind them. Ajun gave the animals complete freedom, convinced that their instinct would lead them straight to the nearest human settlement. However arduous and exhausting the march through the fresh snow might be, none of them succumbed to fatigue, as they were all well aware that any further delay or straying from the path would surely lead to their death. Just how accurately the nomad had judged the animals' instincts became apparent after about an hour, when the dogs made their way past a huge boulder whose shape the hunters recognised well.

This rock – the examination of which would certainly have been of great interest to a scholar – lay about half an hour's walk from the colony.

Suddenly, the Yakut halted the dogs. 'Can you hear the tam-tam, Gospodina?'

'Indeed! – Grandfather Jeanrenaud is worried about me and is giving the signal to keep us on the right path. But over there, I can also hear a jingling and a clamour?'

'It's the bells they're ringing. The children of the white father in St Petersburg have set out to search for Halowa's daughter.'

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Indeed, from time to time, through the swirling snow, one could hear the booming echo of a large Chinese tam-tam, which served as a substitute for the bell in the small settlement. At the same time, voices could be heard calling out from another direction.

The Englishman immediately fired his pistol—which, being a percussion-cap weapon, had not been rendered unusable by the damp—and the group now raised their voices in a collective cry.

The result was immediate. The men who had set out to bring aid, if necessary, to the hunters caught unawares by the blizzard had also heard the shot and the cry and hurried closer. After ten minutes they had reached the men in distress, and a jubilant greeting took place.

At the head of the five settlers, wrapped in wide fox and reindeer furs, stood a young, stately man whose insignia identified him as a non-commissioned officer of the Yenisei Cossack Corps. He hurried towards the young girl with obvious joy, made the humble greeting of the lowly Russian and kissed the hem of her snow-covered fur.

'Praise be to the saints, Gospodina, that we have you back safe and sound. In my anxiety for you, I vowed to Saint Anastasius of Nerchinsk that I would give him a new blue fox fur coat, and I shall keep my promise! How delighted your Diadiuszki will be to see you again!'

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"Look who's here, Mutin, you good lad, where have you been? We thought you were at the Aldan."

"I've come from Pristan – and not alone. Do you know who was with me, Gospodina?"

"Well?"

"The Camel Prince, your little grandfather. He's with the Holowa, and both of them are worried about the light of their eyes and the jewel of their hearts."

The Siberian woman let out a cheerful cry.

‘What – Scheminga Tojan, my dear little grandfather is in the house? This visit couldn’t have come at a better time! Did you hear that, Mikhailov Ivanovich?’

“I have, and I advise you to make the most of this opportunity. There aren’t many grandfathers like that. As for me, I wish I had his fine horse Melilbi between my knees and that it were summer.”

“Your time will come too, Michael Ivanovich. But now, lads, relieve us here at the sledge, and you, Mutin, take the lead and let’s hurry so we can get to the fire pit! Onwards then, Toweritschi’s!”[1]

‘Just a moment,’ said the sergeant suspiciously, turning to the Englishman. ‘*Kto vy tajoj, i czewo protrebujetie!*’[2]

‘Nonsense, Mutin,’ laughed the girl, ‘he’s a stranger and comes from a country of which your [344]
empty-headed fellow has probably never even heard of in his whole life. How is an Englishman supposed to understand your gibberish?”

“*That’s true!* That’s true!” said the Cossack. “But I must see his passport?”

“Out here in the snowstorm? There’ll be plenty of time for that indoors! *Paszol! Paszol!*” And shouting loudly, she glided ahead on her snowshoes.

The others followed, as quickly as carrying the frozen man would allow.

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Two hours later, most of the party who had braved the fierce snowstorm were sitting round the hearth in Holowa’s log cabin.

The old Frenchman’s log cabin was quite spacious, built of spruce and birch trunks, with the outer walls daubed with earth. In accordance with Siberian custom, it consisted of two compartments, apart from the entrance hall formed by uncut trunks used as pillars. The larger front compartment was intended for general use. The log walls were clad with birch bark, the joints filled with moss. On one side stood the wide Tatar fireplace, the czulan, built of clay bricks, with the wooden tschuwal or chimney, and the low stove surrounded by benches, whilst above
half the room was used as sleeping quarters by the Potatje, who were about 1½ ell from the ceiling
. [345]

The interior walls were partly hung with reindeer and walrus hides. Hanging from wooden pegs were furs, garments, nets, and fishing and hunting equipment of the sort used in this wilderness to hunt and trap fur-bearing animals—ranging from the slender ermine and sable, which are shot with blunt bolts or caught in snares, to the mighty polar bear. A few iron and copper implements stood on wooden shelves near the fireplace, interspersed with Chinese tea chests and all manner of delicate crafts from the Middle Kingdom.

[1] Comrades! The customary form of address on the banks of the Lena.

[2] Who are you and what are you doing here?

Thick felt rugs with bearskins, intended for sleeping, lay against the walls to the right and left. Reindeer antlers, bear hams and dried salmon of impressive size hung by the fireplace, whilst a cauldron bubbled over the fire and the samovar simmered. At the back of the log cabin were two separate rooms, one of which served as a bedroom for Holowa's granddaughter, whilst the other contained the household provisions and the tribute of furs which the convicts and the nomads of the district were required to hand over to the government here.

The most peculiar ornament in this hall or kitchen-diner was an object quite capable of attracting the attention of others besides the little naturalist, who now sat safe and sound, wrapped up to his chin in a large fox-fur, near the fire, his eyes fixed on it, whilst his cheeks were warming in the
[346]
pleasant task of nourishing his inner self.

This strange ornament consisted of a colossal, well-preserved mammoth skull with both complete tusks, measuring a full fourteen feet in length at their widest point.

It is a well-known fact nowadays that northern Siberia brings to market annually some 40,000 pounds of fossil ivory, or the tusks of at least a hundred of these prehistoric giant animals. They are found by the northern nomadic peoples in the ice—which has been lying there for millennia and has melted due to some change in temperature—or in the riverbank mud of the great rivers, but are usually destroyed out of greed or ignorance, so that – given the difficulty of reporting their discovery and transporting them from those desolate, immeasurable expanses – even the St Petersburg Museum has, to date, only two complete skeletons. –

In the centre of the room stood a roughly-carpentered table with benches on either side. Seated around it were the men whom the vagaries of chance had brought together here, whilst Véra Tungil-bi bustled to and fro with an old, witch-like-looking woman, the house's servant, serving the men tea, brandy and food, whilst paying particular attention to the little scholar. She had now taken off her heavy hunting clothes and was wearing a short skirt of red Chinese silk trimmed with fur, and the wide gilded headband of the Russian national costume on her
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hair, which fell in long plaits down over her beautiful nape.

The eyes of the two younger men at the table—the Englishman and the Cossack sergeant—followed with obvious admiration the free yet graceful movements of the girl, who did not fail to notice this attention but who, with a certain air of coquetry, seemed to take no notice of it. But the attention of the two eldest members of the company, too, remained constantly fixed upon her, and frequently one or the other of the two 'grandfathers' would call her over to them, as if to assure themselves that their pride and joy had indeed escaped the danger safe and sound.

We have already described Holowa. The place of honour at the table was taken by the father of his late wife, the Tungus chieftain Scheminga Tojon, or the
'Camel Prince', as the Cossack called him. There was something truly venerable and even

the cheerful humour of the distinguished young Englishman, as well as the sarcasm and arrogance of the exile, in the appearance of the Tungus patriarch, whose gaunt yet robust figure had not been bent by the ninety years that had passed over his head. White hair fell from beneath his cap over his gaunt cheeks down to his shoulders, and his lack of a beard scarcely detracted from his venerable appearance. Sparse facial hair is, in general, a distinctive feature of these nomadic tribes of the North. A fiery dark eye with a sharp
[348]
Mongolian cut flashed out from beside his eagle-like, aquiline nose, set in a face rich with wrinkles and covered in peculiar blue tattoos forming strange patterns, and took on a very special expression of tenderness whenever it turned towards his great-granddaughter. The old man wore a tight-fitting fur coat of white reindeer hide on his bare torso, covered at the front by the traditional apron, the ‘handi’, trimmed with flowing strands of horse and camel tail hair. His short trousers, held together at the hips by a cord, ended in small half-boots made of camel skin with soles of smoked leather. The cap was made from the pelt of a roe deer’s head, from which the ears and young antlers still protruded. Beside the old man stood a large basket woven from Chinese reed, filled with silk fabrics and precious Chinese goods, from which the elderly chieftain would, every time the young girl filled his teacup or otherwise attended to him, he would hand her one of the often very valuable objects he had acquired through barter with the Chinese beyond the Amur and brought back as a gift. Sometimes it was a thin weave of grass linen, sometimes a precious silk fabric interwoven with colours and gold, sometimes a delicate ivory carving or a valuable piece of jewellery made of gold and silver wire. Wéra Tungilbi, incidentally, seemed quite accustomed to these gifts, for she accepted them without much attention or thanks and set them aside without giving them a second thought.
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When the kitchen door was opened, one could see, beneath the shed-like porch of the house—which offered little protection even against the north wind and the snow—another group of people who seemed better able to endure the cold, for the fire made from a peat-like substance and reindeer dung, around which they huddled, could do little to ward it off. Both two-legged and four-legged creatures had gathered here, and the former were from time to time given a cauldron full of steaming brick tea from the house’s kitchen. The valiant Yakut Ajun and, at times, Sergei the Katorgi, acted as hosts here, whilst the guests consisted of a few servants and slaves of the aged Camel Prince and the treacherous Jamszyks—or guides of the travellers—who, together with their dogs, had so shamefully abandoned their masters during the blizzard. The party, having been happily rescued from the perils of the northern snowstorm, had found the treacherous dog-sleigh drivers already there upon their arrival at the colony, and the first task undertaken by the Russians, Michael, the Cossack non-commissioned officer, and even the katorgi, was to drag the refugees out of the yurts into which they had cowered and beat them mercilessly with the kantschuh. Incidentally, the incident seemed to have had an equally beneficial effect on both parties; for it had stirred the Russians’ blood to such an extent that they needed no further incitement, and the Yakut

sledge drivers, having endured the punishment, were heartily glad to be relieved of their guilt and responsibility and to be able to proceed without
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fear of consuming a hearty meal.

This consisted mainly of the national dish of the Yukola and Katschema peoples, that is to say, dried and smoked fish with tscheremscha (wild garlic) and a porridge made from water, spruce bark and millet, which was greased with undoma and sora, a sour oil, and lumps of seal blubber, and eaten with the chamyjak, a large spoon passed round in turn.

The table inside the house was somewhat better laid. It featured, first of all, the two front paws of the bear so bravely killed by Véra, a cooked—albeit somewhat tough—reindeer ham and raw sauerkraut in heads, accompanied by a kind of pirogi, those bun-like pastries filled with meat or other ingredients that are popular throughout Russia. The tea bubbling in the samovar was of a far superior quality—a gift from the Camel Prince from his barter trade with the Chinese—and there was even sugar from Arkhangelsk and American rum.

The two old men and the professor, who spoke Russian quite fluently, sat together at one end of the table; the Lord and Michaeloff sat opposite one another; and Mutin the Cossack sat with Sergei—who, although he did not belong to this circle, had been invited to join them on account of his valiant conduct—at the other end of the narrow table.

‘Consider this, worthy *amici* and inhabitants of the far north,’ declared the little professor unctuously, whilst
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As he sipped from his teacup, ‘what treasures of science and the educated world would be lost if, as a result of this accident – “Buran”, as they seem to call this hurricane in these parts, although I still cannot quite work out whether the word is etymologically derived from the Greek *βορεας* or the Latin *Bora*! – so if, after so much unspeakable toil and hardship, I were to be deprived of these important collections, which I gathered with my own hands on the shores of the Arctic Ocean in the fields of botany, geology, Zoologicis and other related sciences – that proposition stating that the present equatorial regions, commonly known as the tropical zone, once suffered from total freezing of the Earth’s crust, whilst the openings at the two poles, which undoubtedly existed in the pastand later blocked during the Earth’s upheavals, the true hot or present-day tropical zone was situated between 90° and 73° north and south latitude, due to the efflux of heat from the subterranean fire forming the Earth’s core. The abundant occurrence of fossils of monocotyledonous plants on the banks of the Lena, the Yenisei, the Olensk and even the Mackenzin proves this conclusively, and it should therefore be beyond doubt that that Garden of God, named after the Persian *Eden*, the Elysium of the Greeks – the Valhalla of the inhabitants of the present-day North – was by no means situated between
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the Tigris and Euphrates, but rather in the region between the Spree and the Oder.”

The two listeners to the learned professor heard him speak with astonishment and admiration. – Jeanrenaud, although he had received a higher education in his youth, had, over the years, become so alienated from all the contentious issues of scholarly Europe that he understood virtually nothing of the professor's ramblings and only, upon hearing the relocation of Paradise, began to harbour the quiet thought that the current temperature at the North Pole must have exerted various chilling influences on the brain of his unexpected guest; – Sche-minga, however, who also understood Russian, believed he could hear the mysterious incantations of one of his shamans addressed to Boa, the creator of the world; he plucked a few horse-hairs from his apron and, in accordance with Yakut custom, threw them over his left shoulder as a belläch, or offering, to the evil mountain spirits.

The little professor took great pleasure in noting the astonished admiration of his two listeners; he cut off another bite from the succulent bear paw standing before him, which he first carefully examined through a small magnifying glass before popping it into his mouth, and then, quietly amused, turned once more to the host, this time changing the subject of his discourse.

'As you assure me, *amice*, or rather, to speak in accordance with the custom of your homeland, esteemed

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Brat![1] this is the forepaw of *the *ursus ferus**, an animal of this country, as I presume, *plantigrade* according to Tiedemann, with six blunt incisors in each jaw, genus **arctus**, species **urus niger**, and I must confess that, despite its degeneration from the primeval grandeur it must surely have possessed—and of which the polar or ice bear still gives a rough idea, as I have learnt to my own cost, having once found myself, so to speak, in the clutches of such a monster and been rescued only by the strength and courage of my young friend and pupil, just as today through the acumen and energy of that maiden, a delight to behold in this cold land – two stories which, upon my return to Berlin, I intend to publish immediately in the Haude and Spener's Newspaper, under the 'Miscellaneous' section – so that, to return to my opening remark, it makes for an exceedingly tasty dish. This naturally leads me to the question of whether you, as most venerable and respectable gentlemen who have long since cast aside the recklessness of youth and undoubtedly harbour a keen interest in the science and geology of your fatherland, have never found here the tracks and remains of the fossilised bear, commonly known as the flat-footed bear or cave bear?«

Despite the convoluted phrasing, the question was so

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simple that old Holowa understood it more or less. 'I do not recall,' he said, filling his short pipe, 'that the Yakuts and those unfortunate souls have found fossilised bears in this region, although there are plenty of living thieves of this sort running about – with your permission, Tojon, as you call him your cousin!'

'You doubt petrification, man,' said the scholar in astonishment, pointing with an admiring glance at the mammoth skull, 'and yet you possess the finest specimen of pre-Tidilian fossilisation, which would delight every museum in Europe, right here in your hut!'

[1] Brat: brother.

‘Ah – that old elephant skull! It’s true, it’s quite a large specimen. *Ventre bleu*, in my youth I saw two of them, and they were very tame and would eat out of anyone’s hand, but they were barely half this size!’

The professor stared at him with his mouth agape. The hair beneath his fur cap would have stood on end, had his scholarly pursuits not long since rendered his skull as bald as a billiard ball.

‘Good heavens! What are you saying, man? You saw living specimens of *the *Elephas primigenius*, *jubatus*, *mammonteus** in your youth?’

The eager scholar pushed the wooden plate with the bear’s paw away from him, reached for his writing tablet and seemed intent on devouring every word from Holowa’s mouth, already grappling in his mind with these new

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discoveries upon his return home, via Lichtenstein and Cuvier.

‘Well, yes – they haven’t been all that rare in Europe since the days of the ancient Romans Pyrrhus and Hannibal. There were two of them in the imperial menagerie in Paris, and whenever I went to the Tuileries Gardens with my mother – God rest the old lady’s soul – I always had my pockets full of sugar cubes for them.’

The young lord, who, without having listened to the three men’s conversation, happened to glance over, burst out laughing at the look of painful disappointment reflected on the face of his older travelling companion.

‘Elephants!’ said the latter in the most pitiful tone of dashed hope – *‘Elephantus communis, asiaticus, africanus* – a clever but commonplace pachyderm! So not even *Mastodon gigantus, othioticus, maximus, congiorostris*, but quite ordinary elephants, such as can be seen in all menageries. *Alas, my* worthy *brother*, you should have said so straight away, instead of leading an unworthy disciple of the sciences into a slightly forgivable state of excitement! So tell me, at the very least, where did you find that remarkable and extremely well-preserved head of *the* genuine **Mammonteus**?’

‘The Yakuts came across it seventeen years ago in the summer, in a marshy mountain gorge. I bought the find from them for twenty silver roubles and had it completely excavated. The other

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set of bones was no longer of any use, so I kept only the head!”

The scholar clasped his hands over his head. “Was of no use whatsoever? Man, are you a barbarian? You could have made your fortune! Do you realise that there is only one complete specimen of our antediluvian friend in the whole of Europe? – But I shall take up residence with you, esteemed *hospes*, until I have succeeded in gathering all those skeletal remains of which you speak, and thereby completing and replacing the little that I have, through unspeakable toil, happily brought here from the shores of the Arctic Ocean, until this devilish hurricane – called the Buran – robbed me of the fruits of months of labour!’

After that comical interlude, the Lord had turned back to his companion.

‘Let’s just let my old, venerable friend ramble on,’ he said cheerfully. ‘He’s sitting in the saddle of his hobbyhorse and galloping along in sheer bliss, travelling back several millennia

back to some primeval stage. Nevertheless, tomorrow or in the next few days, if I so wish, he will be ready to press on with me.'

'You'll need some rest after today's events.'

'A day or two will suffice. If we do not hurry, given the advanced stage of the season, the last American ship, the Ochotzk, will have left before we arrive.'

["]The connection to Japan is never entirely [357]
interrupted. Have you heard, My Lord, what rumours the Cossack from Pristan has brought back?"

"*Yes!* But they seemed rather confused to me."

"Because you do not understand the way these people speak. When did you last receive political news?"

"I received my last letters in Arkhangelsk at the beginning of May. They were from England, dated early April."

'Well then – ours are even more recent, even though they had to travel a distance of more than five thousand versts from St Petersburg to Yakutsk. The rest can be pieced together with the rumours from the Amur that we've just heard. Garibaldi has invaded Sicily and overthrown the last Bourbon kingdom. But that will interest you less than it does me. You'll recall that England and France have sent a military expedition to China."

"Yes, sir!"

"It landed at the mouth of the Peiho River in August, and the European troops are reportedly already marching on Peking. British warships are anchored off Yeddo, where a Prussian embassy has arrived."

"*Bloody hell!* That will interest our professor!"

"You would therefore do well to make your way to Japanese waters, where you will easily find passage to California or Madras. – Perhaps –" he broke off abruptly.

"What were you about to say, sir?"

"Nothing – or rather, a great deal! For example,
that [358]
we might well meet again in Yeddo or San Francisco!" The young lord
looked at him intently.

"Ever since our first meeting, I've felt that a man like you – you told me yourself that you are one of the exiles – must not be allowed to waste away in this wilderness. Do you have any prospect of obtaining a pardon?"

"I have been deprived of my freedom for twelve years, and have been in Siberia for four."

'So are you thinking of escaping? – You saved our lives! I am English and not bound by the laws of your Tsar. If I can be of any assistance, I am at your service!'

'Thank you, My Lord – before I decide to take that risk, I must wait for the next courier to Okhotsk.'

The young man looked thoughtfully at the exile. 'I must tell you,' he said, 'that ever since I saw you up close this evening, it has felt as though I

seen you once before, many years ago. It is folly, and yet it might be possible, for many strangers used to visit my uncle – men from all over Europe."

'What is your uncle's name?'

'It was the Viscount of Heresford. I inherited the title and the marquisate from him as the son of his brother. The better part of his legacy—his love—belonged, alas, to my cousin, whom he had brought up and

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shared many of his idiosyncrasies and inclinations. If, as I suspect, you are one of those unfortunate Poles who were sent to Siberia under the tyranny of Emperor Nicholas, it is nevertheless possible that I may have seen you in better days in London or at my uncle's. I must have been just a boy at the time."

'I am a true thoroughbred Russian, My Lord, from the province of Tver. Nevertheless, it is possible that we have met. I knew your magnanimous uncle, who was passionate about the fight against all tyranny, and heard of his death with deep regret shortly after my relocation.'

'I know, sir,' said the young man gravely, 'that those exiled to Siberia are forbidden, on pain of severe punishment, to give their names, and that they may be identified only by a number?'

"Mine is Twelve Hundred and Four!"

'I do not deserve your mockery, for it is sincere sympathy that moves me to ask this question! The strange circumstances under which we have met, and the debt of gratitude I owe you, prompt me to ask you to tell me your name.'

The exile cast a sharp glance around him. When he saw the Cossack sergeant talking to the girl who had captured his full attention, he leaned his head across the table towards his companion.

'I have already committed one indiscretion in this [360]

regard," he said quietly, "so a second one hardly matters. I am *Michael Bakunin!*"

"What – Mr von Bakunin? The very same man who fought alongside Richard Wagner during the May Uprising in Dresden and was then handed over to the Austrians?"

'And by them to the Russians. That is correct, My Lord. But I must ask you to be careful not to mention my name any further. I was foolish enough, during the retreat from Dresden, to run straight into the arms of a bunch of reactionaries and philistines in a Saxon town[1] and allow myself to be captured by them.'

'I have often heard people speak of you,' said the young lord, 'but I must confess that, even as a budding diplomat, I have heard little of your story, and it seems that in Europe you were thought to be dead. Would you mind telling me a little more?'

"Why? I hope to be able to recount it soon once I am outside the borders of Russia." –

"Then I beg you to do so!"

"Well – it will be very little indeed! – You have already told me that you spent a year in St Petersburg as an attaché to the British legation. That is enough to establish our

[1] Chemnitz.

Russian conditions in general. But they are now golden compared to the iron tyranny exercised by the late Emperor Nicholas. He never forgot! So the 10,000 silver roubles also remained,
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which had been put on my head in St Petersburg following my speech in Paris, remained fresh in his memory, even though my subsequent activities did Russia more good than harm. The dream of my youth—the union of the Romance, Slavic and Germanic revolutionary forces—came true sooner than I had hoped. The year forty-eight brought it about. At that time I rode the waves of the revolution, like a petrel on the stormy sea. Alas, the dream was short-lived; the peoples of Europe were not yet ripe enough; they were still bound by superstition in matters of religion and monarchy. The latter triumphed once more everywhere, and the Saxon courts sentenced the prisoner at Königstein to death. Fortunately for me, people in Dresden are not keen to please the Cabinet in St Petersburg; they cannot yet forget the Polish throne and the outcome of the Seven Years' War. Therefore, a way out was found, and instead of locking me up in prison like Heubner and others, I was handed over to the Austrian government, which, from Prague and Vienna, had a Metternich-style grudge against me!"

"Were you imprisoned at Hradčany in Prague?"

'Yes! The Czech party—whose strength still has a future ahead of it—did make a few attempts to secure my release, but the castle's rocky foundations are strong enough to withstand more than one hunger tower[1]
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; the attempt to break through the stone was ridiculous, and as for exercising their wit in any other way, they lacked a Karl Schurz. As a token of gratitude for Russian aid in Hungary, I was finally handed over to Russia."

'Your fate must have been terrible!'

The exile laughed. 'I see that you still know very little about conditions in Russia! That extradition took place with my full consent. Or do you think that Spielberg and Kufstein offer more comforts than Schlüsselburg and Tobolsk? At least Russian dungeons are populated solely by political prisoners, not by the clergy's hatred! Moreover, our dungeons are reserved only for pretenders to the throne and the Poles, and the Russian nobility never abandons one of its own. I was, admittedly, imprisoned for some time in Kronstadt and Schlüsselburg, but by 1856 I was already in the Caucasus. A moment of carelessness – an epigram on a beautiful countess who was playing a prominent role at the court of St Petersburg at the time – sent me to Irkutsk."

'But how did we come to meet here?'

'I do not care for police surveillance! You are probably unaware that the Muravievs are my close relatives, and even though my political views have driven a wedge between me and the heads of the family,
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[1] The existence of this dreadful dungeon at Prague Castle, dating back to the Hussite era, is little known. A well in the rocky ground held those condemned to a horrific death. Religious, political and personal hatred have filled it with victims for centuries!

‘Yet certain connections always arise. At least they benefit my family!’

‘Are you married?’

‘Yes – I was such a fool! – General Kossakoff, the Governor-General of Eastern Siberia, allowed me to go to the Amur to earn my living there as an interpreter for the American merchants. You must realise, in any case, that the movement of the exiles destined for colonisation – the Posieleniec – is fairly unrestricted within the boundaries of the province. A chance encounter led me to this outpost near the upper route to Okhotsk, and as I found a combination of favourable circumstances here, I have remained here until – –[«]

‘Until?’

“Well – until I am needed in Europe. Did you get to know Herzen in London?” The young man shrugged his shoulders with refinement. “Although I am of noble birth and upbringing ,” he said coldly, “I nevertheless understand and respect a character such as yours or that of my uncle. Every man has the right to fight, provided he puts his own person on the line. I shall never regard banknote forgers as martyrs for a great cause.”

The exile smiled. ‘Diplomats,’ he remarked, ‘are usually less scrupulous in their choice of means for political ends!’

‘*Very well!* That may be so, sir – but I have already told you that I am a thoroughly poor diplomat [364] , and that is why I gave up the whole business and tendered my resignation as Her Majesty’s Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Just as he arrived – that was at the end of April this year – my old tutor at Göttingen, Professor Peterlein, happened to arrive from Berlin to lead a scientific expedition to the Arctic Ocean in search of magnetic needles and fossilised bones. So I thought to myself that I might as well go and shoot polar bears and blue foxes in Novaya Zemlya as deer and capercaillies in the Highlands; I offered to accompany him, since his companion preferred to stay in St Petersburg, and – *la voilà!*’

‘It certainly takes the taste of a Briton to travel to the Arctic Circle for pleasure. But look, My Lord, at what that wild girl is up to! I believe she has her eye on your worthy companion, and if Véra has taken it into her head to turn his head, all the mammoth bones and Tertiary fossils in the world won’t save him!’

Indeed, the young Siberian woman had settled herself on a small stool between the Tungus chieftain and the German professor, and was pouring both of them large glasses full of tea, which she fortified with plenty of rum, whilst flirting with both of them in turn.

A twinkle in her eye, as she met the exile’s gaze, proved to him that she was pursuing a specific aim.

‘Be on your guard, My Lord,’ whispered the Russian, ‘she’s up to some devilry! I know her.’ [365]

Indeed, the strong drink was already taking its toll on the three older people.

The aged Tungus began to shake his head from side to side and to intone a sort of two-part chant in which the names Tungilbi and Melilbi were repeated.

‘Listen, learned sir, Grandfather is singing the Kur[1], about how he won Tungilbi, my ancestral mother,
from the Manchu Khan and carried her off across the desert on his famous mare Melilbi.” –

[“]A heroic song? – an epic of the Tungus people? – *Alas*, maiden, – you must translate it for me and I shall write it down and publish it in the Journal of Foreign Literature under the name of that old man – what is his name again?”

“Scheminga Tojon, learned sir!”

“I thank you, lovely maiden; for, judging by all I have seen so far of the women of the Samoyedic people in this most interesting, though somewhat cold, country, you are like a blooming rose upon the snowfields.”

The girl laughed coquettishly. ‘Do I really please you? Since you are, after all, a well-travelled gentleman and
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know everything, you must understand it better than the uncouth lads who live here.”

‘Ah—you are like the flower of Sharon of which the ancient writers speak. Admittedly, according to the rules of classical beauty, your chin could be a little broader, and your eyes—a most dangerous feature on your face—could be a degree or two closer to the horizontal line; but I conclude that these are the natural characteristics of Eastern standards of beauty—and on the whole” – the little professor wiped the sweat from his brow, somewhat sheepishly, and took a sip of tea, –
“all in all, to speak as a man of truth, I would not change a single thing about you other than what the almighty Creator of the universe and all that is within it has fashioned to glorify the creature within you.”

The Siberian woman smiled at this triumph of her beauty, of which she was well aware, whilst the professor took another sip of tea, and then continued her assault on him with the direct question: ‘whether he was married in his homeland?’

The learned gentleman became very flustered. ‘No, young lady,’ he said at last – ‘I have had no opportunity to enter into the bonds of marriage, for in my younger years, when I too, as is the nature of the human race, would surely have been receptive to love for a woman, I was too poor to be able to support a wife, and in later years I had no time
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for it, as my time was devoted to solving the great problems of the science of the history of this globe.’

‘You did, after all, leave these to the so-called God a moment ago,’ interjected the exile mockingly – ‘so science has nothing more to do with evolution.’

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[1] The small wooden fiddle of the Tungus people, with which they accompany their songs of hunting and love – also used for singing itself.

The scholar, thus freed for the moment from his beautiful tormentor, turned to the questioner. *'Good heavens!* A rationalist in this country? Might you even be a follower of the new doctrine of matter?'

'Does a doubt about the existence of your God surprise you so much in this country, when you have enough examples before your very eyes that cast doubt upon it?'

The little professor was not the sort of man to let the gauntlet lie; rather – despite the rigidity of his thinking, brought about by the sheer volume of his studies and scholarly conclusions – he was a man of deep religious feeling.

'He who commands the icebergs and the fiery torrents of lava with equal might,' he said with deep solemnity, 'and who says to them: "This far and no further!" sent you out into the storm just a few hours ago to save us from death. But who, as I have been told, saved you and all of us from that sea of ice floes, in which even the natives had lost their bearings?'

'Who? – The dogs' noses!'

'And who gave the dog its instinct?'

'Nature!'

The little scholar shrugged his shoulders. 'Wretched

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defiance, which revolves round general concepts and refuses to see. I do not know whether I have the honour of debating with a member of the St Petersburg Academy of Sciences, whom adverse circumstances have brought here, or merely with a man whom his misfortune has made bitter and defiant towards his Creator! – but the great and inscrutable mystery of human nature itself ought to prove to you that, beyond our explanations of the process of creation, there is a divine origin!»

'Man, perhaps?' remarked the nihilist scornfully. 'I stick to the theories of my friend Vogt!'

'The "ape professor"?' asked the young lord with a laugh, having followed the conversation with interest.

'If you wish to call him that – why not? Or—" the door of the porch just opened, and the flame of the fire illuminated the faces of the nomads, glistening with fat and tallow in bestial gluttony, — "do you think that those creatures stand so far above the ape that this species of the animal kingdom could not be their origin?"

A solemn voice took over the reply. It was old

Holova who spoke.

'However lowly you may regard them, Michael Ivanovich,' he said simply, 'they believe in a God!'

'Their superstition is their greatest flaw, apart from their gluttony,' came the scornful reply. 'Ask the Tojon whom he still considers more powerful today: Boa – his idol – or his good friend, the bear?'

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These words, like part of the conversation, had been spoken in Russian.

The Yakut prince had therefore been able to understand them. The old man set down the duck's head with which he had been wiping his red eyes, stretched out his hand and touched his white-haired son-in-law's chest with his index finger.

'Tell me!' he said.

"What, Amenikan?[1]"

"How the stranger with black hair came to Alanmur, the Tungus child, and why Scheminga, who is a tojon of his tagaun,[2] took him into his tent!"

"Then, Amenikan, may I first tell the stranger how you, too, won my wife's hand?"

"Then speak of the days when a Tojon of the Oewöenki[3] was young! Tungilbi Uta[4], you shall sit at your elder father's side."

"I sit at your feet, Amenikan, and listen! Do come a little closer to me, learned sir – the company of a silly Siberian country girl will do you no harm!"

The professor wiped his brow once more—flushed from the strong tea and the excitement—and moved
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closer with great embarrassment when he happened to meet the mischievous gaze of his former pupil.

Even the Cossack and the katorgi moved closer. The former watched with dark glances as the girl flirted with the learned stranger.

Outside, the Burany was showering the wasteland with thick snowflakes. The

Holowa began.

A BRIDAL PROCESSION ACROSS THE STEPPE.

The Tungus tribes, strangers to us, are divided into the Forest or Reindeer Tungus and the Steppe or Horse Tungus – the former dwell north of the mountains, the latter in the south by Lake Baikal and the Lena, and possess vast herds of horses, cattle and sheep, which they graze on the vast steppes of the Chinese frontier. The Evenki people were once powerful and numerous, and paid tribute only to the Great Emperor in the Middle Kingdom. This continued until the Russians arrived and declared: 'This land is ours!' From then on, every Donk[5] had to pay two sable furs as Deleur[7] to the Uprawitel[6] in the tribute hut.

When I arrived in the country – I shall tell you later how it came about – the territory beyond the
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[1] Father.

[2] Tribe, clan.

[3] The Tungus call themselves Oewöen or Oewöenki.

[4] Little child.

[5] Donki, another name for the Tungus.

[6] District magistrate.

[7] Tribute.

Schilka was not yet in Russian hands, and they were not permitted to travel down the Amur without the permission of the Long-Tailed Ones; for there were Chinese guard posts everywhere, and anyone who violated the border laws had their body slit open on the spot.

At the time, however, when Scheminga was still young, no one paid any heed to the borders, and the Tagauns roamed far and wide across the steppes along the Amur, as far as the strength of their bows and the hooves of their horses would take them.

In those days, Urkundu, Scheminga's father and the Tojon of the Dulegat clan, lived on the Argun and was a feared chieftain. Yet his son Scheminga's name was feared even more. His Luk[1] struck the bird in flight, and his Gidda[2] pierced the bear's chest in the Ore Mountains of Nerchinsk. He rode the wildest stallion on the steppe and loved to hunt in the lands of the Manshuhs, letting his falcon soar from his fist alongside them, or catching the Omul[3] as it swam up from Lake Baikal into the rivers.

Beyond the Argun lived Tolga, who was then the richest of the Manshu princes. He owned more than 3,000 horses, 10,000 head of cattle and sheep, and many camels. But his greatest treasure was Tungilbi, his daughter. She rode like a man, threw the spear like a warrior, and was as beautiful as Ilkun, the month of flowers. Tolga-Khan was very proud of his daughter and had personally
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envoys of the Emperor of the Middle, who had heard of her beauty.

Scheminga was a guest at the Khan's camp whilst his herds grazed on the summer pastures, and he often rode out hunting with him. But what drew him in were not Tolga's steeds and falcons, but the black eyes of his daughter Tungilbi. Those eyes had not turned towards the young Tojon in vain – he, too, found favour with them, and soon the two were lovers.

But a major obstacle stood in the way of the lovers' wishes being fulfilled. The girl's father was, as mentioned, wealthy, whilst Scheminga's father, although the most powerful chieftain of his tribe, was by no means as well-off, and his possessions were limited mainly to a few herds of horses. It was to be expected that the Khan would demand a very high shurun[4]
[373]
, which the entire Dulegat tribe would be unable to raise.

The Tungus – and indeed the nomadic peoples of the East in general – count the year twice; they divide it into the summer and winter years, which together comprise thirteen Lega's or lunar cycles. It was in the Month of Flowers when the young Tojon Melilbi saddled his mare and, together with six of his companions, once again set out across the Manshu steppe to reach the camp of the

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[1] Arrow.

[2] Hunting spear.

[3] Salmon, *Salmo gregarius.*

[4] *Schurun* is the name given to the bride-price. As with many other uncivilised nations, the daughters of the family are only handed over to the suitor upon payment of a bride-price. Among the nomadic peoples of Asia, however, this price—which is determined by the girl's beauty and rank and is often very high—is less a purchase sum payable to the parents than a security held by them on behalf of the bride, should it occur to the husband—as does sometimes happen—to send her back after a shorter or longer period of time. The Mongolian beauties are therefore actually not so badly off, and in any case are in a more secure position than their European counterparts! – The fourth part of the shurun usually constitutes the ischi (Tungusic for 'dowry') of the bride.

To seek out the Khan. For as he had no fixed abode but roamed about with his herds, and even his nearest encampment lay five to six days' ride from the yurts of the Tungus chieftain, it took time to track him down on the basis of the scant information provided by a few herdsmen. Scheminga had his own secret motives for this visit and had therefore selected the boldest and bravest of his companions. Each of them led an unmounted horse by the hand, so that by taking turns they could continue the ride as swiftly as possible; for the regions through which their route led were the haunts of border bandits, escaped Russian convicts and Chinese exiles, who roamed in whole bands, often numbering more than a hundred men, plundering caravans and raiding nomadic camps to rob and pillage. They would track the travellers' trail for days on end, with the aim of eventually seizing the horses as booty and selling the people into slavery.

The first day's ride took the horsemen to the banks of the Argun. Here they spent the night,
, for on [374]
they would have to swim across the wide and deep river. The horsemen therefore took off their clothes, tied them into a bundle and secured it on their heads. Thus they swam across without incident, passed through the broad strip of thick scrub that lines the Argun, and rode towards the mountains in high spirits.

In the afternoon they came to a mountain gorge in which fresh horse tracks were visible.

After the Red Indians of North America, the Tungus are the best trackers in the world. They recognise and follow the tracks of game by the flattened moss and grass or by marks on bare earth, where no other eye would be able to make out the slightest trace. The easily recognisable imprints of the horses' hooves were therefore a very clear sign to them that enemies were nearby. Indeed, smoke could be seen rising further along the gorge. They therefore halted; two men dismounted and crept, under the cover of the rocky cliffs, to a protruding boulder from which they had an unobserved view of the valley. It was a grassy spot, supplied with fresh water and firewood, which Scheminga had chosen as their own camp for the night. But others had got there before them, for the scouts discovered a band of more than a hundred men there, all well-armed. Some were sitting in front of the erected yurts, others were tending to the horses, and still others were preparing food over the fires. There was no doubt that they had come across a gang that was currently on a raid
[375]
. Whilst the scouts were still listening, they saw two horsemen gallop into the camp, causing the whole band to fall into a state of agitation upon their arrival. The new arrivals pointed unmistakably towards the strangers' hiding place – it was certain that they had been spotted on the way and would be pursued. In the greatest possible haste, the Tungus therefore rode back a short distance along their route and then turned into a side valley that led them into the higher parts of the mountains. As long as daylight permitted, they rode briskly forward, frequently changing horses. Only when it was completely dark did they stop to make camp for the night; they lit a fire in a sheltered ravine and took turns keeping watch, not only because of the robbers, but also

because of the tigers, which often roam as far as this point. The night, however, passed without incident; at the very first light of dawn, the seven companions were back in the saddle and hurried on their way. They feared that the robbers might have informed the neighbouring regions of their presence through messengers, and that these might block their path on all sides. The whole day's ride was completed without incident, and in the evening the camp was once again secured by sentries. But in the middle of the night the horses grew restless; their snorting left no doubt that other horses were nearby. In the morning, as they continued their journey, they found traces of horse hooves at the next rocky pass and could clearly see that two horses had been tethered there during the night, their riders having gone as far as the
[376]
camp. They had therefore been discovered once again.

Scheminga therefore took his precautions. He had one of his companions trot ahead and followed cautiously behind, whilst another man led all the unridden horses. At the very next bend in the gorge, the advance guard signalled that enemies were nearby. The young Tojon galloped over and saw that, a short distance away, four armed horsemen were blocking the path, whilst from a side gorge a large band of armed men was coming down, raising their wild war cries. A swift decision was now required. Scheminga called out to his men to hold their ground, swung his short battle-axe—which the eastern nomads had adopted from the Kyrgyz—and charged at the foremost of the enemy. A mighty blow from the axe split the Manshu's skull, so that the blade pierced the nape of the mare, which toppled over with her dead rider. Two other robbers lost their lives under the spear thrusts of the brave Tungus's companions; the fourth escaped by the skin of his teeth into the side ravine. Scheminga and his men had a clear run; though the band of robbers followed them, shouting and threatening, for several hours, they soon realised that the strangers' horses were swifter and more enduring than their own, and they abandoned the pursuit.

On the sixth evening, the Tojon found his beloved's camp. As always, he was
warmly received by
the [377]
Khan and invited to stay with his companions. Nothing gave him any indication of a change until he managed to speak to Tungilbi in private.

It was then that the full extent of his misfortune and the imminence of the impending danger were revealed to him. During the winter, at the time when the Khan had set out with his herds for the plains
, a young Mongol prince had come to the Khan's camp and courted Tungilbi. The Khan demanded a high schurun, but the Mongol was the lord of immeasurable herds and promised to pay it. In a few days' time, he was to arrive at Tolga's pastures, hand over the schurun, and take his bride.

The lovers deliberated at length on what to do to avert the impending fate. Tungilbi declared that she was prepared to allow her lover to carry her off; he had already devised a plan for this back in their homeland and had taken his companions with him. But Scheminga's nature was averse to breaking the bonds of hospitality whilst he was still enjoying it and the Khan trusted him, and he resolved, despite his knowledge of the customs of the

steppe, to appear before him the following morning and assert his prior claim to Tungilbi.

The next morning, as the Khan sat outside his yurt, surrounded by his most distinguished warriors and servants, Scheminga, followed by his companions, approached him; at the Khan's invitation, he sat down on the felt blanket beside him and smoked the pipe with him.
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Only after this had taken place did the elder of the Tungus rise, make the sign of greeting to their host, and say, pointing to his young friend:

'May the Great Khan of the Manshu open his eyes and ears. This is Scheminga Tojon, son of Urkundu, from the Tagaun of the Dunegat.'

'I see!'

'His father's name is renowned throughout the mountains; he is a wise and valiant man. Even the Muscovites honour and fear him, and their general has given him a medal of pure gold to wear upon his chest.'

The Khan merely shook his head in acknowledgement of the qualities of his old acquaintance.

'Scheminga Tojon,' continued the speaker, 'is his father's heir. He will rule over the Dulegat, and the people call him the bravest warrior between Lake Baikal and the Great Sea. He owns many horses and sheep, but his yurt is empty. No one welcomes him when he returns home from the hunt. The Khan of the Manshu has a daughter. She is of marriageable age. Urkundu Tojon is courting the beautiful Tungilbi on behalf of his friend for his son Scheminga."

The Khan shook his sleeve. 'You have stirred up a great deal of dust on your way here! But you have not yet spoken of the shurun that is demanded for a girl as rare as Tungilbi.'

'The Tojon owns horses and sheep. His [379]
camp is full of sable and ermine furs, and heaps of ore lie beside his arans. May the Great Khan of the Manshu determine the schurun."

The Great Khan took his time. Then he took his pipe from his mouth and said: 'The young Tojon, the Dulegat, should have spoken sooner. My daughter is not for everyone; I can give her to only one man. I have promised her to the Sultan of the Khalchas; he is paying a good shurun: a thousand horses, a thousand cattle, five thousand sheep and a thousand camels. If the young Tojon of the Donki offers the same, he shall have Tungilbi, for I love him and he is a fine hunter and warrior!"

The statement had a deeply disheartening effect, for it amounted to a virtual rejection. Everyone knew that – even if the whole tribe managed to muster the required horses, cattle and sheep, a prospect which was in itself highly doubtful – there could be no question of procuring camels, as these are possessed only by the nomads of the lower steppes.

Scheminga's matchmaker therefore tried to raise an objection. "The Great Khan of the Manshu has numerous herds – he has no need to increase them! The Donki have horses – they will give him brood mares! And cattle and sheep, too, if he

so requests. But they do not own any camels. Tolga is a wise chieftain; let him demand other things in their place.'

The Khan, however, made a gesture of refusal. [380]

'The black disease struck my herds last winter, and almost all my camels fell victim to it. I must have camels. Or is Tolga Khan's daughter not worth a thousand humped beasts? To cut a long story short, Tungilbi has been promised to the young prince of the Chalcha, who gladly offered to act as the schurun. He will arrive with the herds in three days and bring Tungilbi to his camp!"

Up to this point, Scheminga had sat in silence throughout the proceedings, in accordance with local custom. However, when the Khan now signalled that the discussion was over, he rose to his feet.

'My father has spoken,' he said. 'Tungilbi is worth a thousand times more than a thousand camels. I love her. If Scheminga Tojon brings a thousand camels as a shurun to the Great Khan of the Manshu in three days' time, will the Khan give him his daughter?'

'I shall do so.'

"Very well! – Let us set out to hunt the wild horses!"

Not a word more was spoken; the whole party mounted their horses and galloped off.

Hunting wild horses is a very arduous task, for the animals are exceedingly shy and have a very keen sense of smell. It is exceedingly difficult even for the most cunning hunter to outwit them, and he must search long and intently before he can identify the pass through which they descend from the mountains into the plain and return to the mountains again. Once this has been achieved,
[381]
the hunters wait for the moment when the animals have ventured as far as possible into the plain; a detachment then attempts to reach the pass from behind them and takes up position there, whilst the others form a semicircular line stretching for a mile, which gradually narrows and drives the animals back towards the mountains. Then, at a signal from the leader, the horsemen charge towards their prey – the noble steeds flee back towards the pass, rush blindly into it and suddenly find themselves attacked from the front and the rear. Now a wild melee ensues, into which the hunter, axe or noose in hand—depending on whether he intends to kill or capture—throws himself only at the risk of his own life; for if he loses his seat and falls beneath the hooves of the rearing, biting, kicking steeds with their flying manes and glowing eyes, a painful death is certain.

But the nomads of the steppes and mountains are as daring as they are skilled horsemen. Their short axes come down with a heavy blow upon the heads of the noble animals, and within a few minutes the slaughter is over; – those that have not broken through and fled lie slain on the ground or struggle wearily in the nooses and bonds that already bind their limbs. The flesh of the wild horses is considered a delicacy by the hunters.

The hunt proceeded in much the same way this time too, except that the Khan was struck on the leg by one of the wild stallions, forcing him to retreat to
[382]

return to his camp and lie still on his felt blanket for several days until the bruise had healed.

In the evening, as the first stars began to twinkle, the lovers met in a secluded spot and discussed their misfortune. Tungilbi vowed to her beloved with the Ada-katschan, the oath, that she would rather die than become the wife of a stranger, and Scheminga swore that he, too, would risk his life to win her. Then, on the pretext of preparing their escape, he took his leave of her, having first carefully enquired in which direction the new bridegroom and his herds were expected to arrive.

The next morning, Scheminga had vanished from the yurt he shared with his companions, along with one of them; the others explained that he had ridden out to hunt roe deer, and as this had happened frequently, the Khan, in his grief, paid no further heed to his young guest, but looked forward with all the greater eagerness to the arrival of his new son-in-law.

It was not until the evening of the third day that shepherds galloping up announced that they had seen the dust swirling in the distance from a vast herd.

Amidst a flood of tears, Tungilbi was urged by her father's wives to put on her finest garments. Felt mats were spread out on the ground in front of the Khan's yurts for people to sit upon, and huge fires were lit to roast more than one [383]
sheep in honour of the arrival of the Prince of the Chalchas.

Soon, too, the sound of the approaching herd could be heard in the distance, and the long necks of the camels could be seen silhouetted against the evening sky!

Tungilbi veiled her face in her robes!

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Meanwhile, Scheminga Tojon, riding his swift mare Melilbi, had set off southwards with his companion. He intended to confront the Mongol prince and challenge him to a duel, thereby either freeing his beloved from her suitor once and for all or at least gaining some time.

Such duels with bow and arrow are very common on the steppe. The Tungus call them 'Kutschigera's', and in earlier times they were held, just like the tournaments of the European Middle Ages, in the presence of their tribal chiefs and elders.

On the first day, the horsemen rode eight miles and, towards evening, camped on the northern shore of a small lake, which was fringed with scrub and reeds.

The inner turmoil that consumed him allowed the young Tojon little sleep.

At the first light of dawn, he placed the small saddle made of reindeer ribs on Melilbi, his mare, ordered his companion to wait for him at their night's encampment, and rode out on a reconnaissance mission.

He set off along the shore of the lake, thinking that the herds of the
[384]
Mongol prince would also head there to water the animals.

He had been riding slowly for about half an hour when he suddenly heard a loud, piercing cry for help and, in the next instant, saw a horseman galloping towards him at breakneck speed.

The rider hung unarmed from his horse's neck, and it took him several seconds – even though he was a young and strapping man – to get back into the saddle; yet even then he could not gain control of his horse, which was galloping away in wild terror. The rider's long, caftan-like outer garment fluttered, torn, in the draught.

The fear of the rider and his horse was not without reason. Scheminga, who remained motionless on his mare—which merely pricked up her ears and snorted against the bit—took in at a glance what had happened and the danger in which the stranger found himself.

The stranger must have come from the opposite direction and, with a second horse in hand, had probably been attempting to water his horses at an open cove on the lake when a massive tiger had pounced on him from the thicket of reeds. The rider had barely had time to throw himself from his rearing steed onto the neck of his lead horse—leaving behind part of his garment and sustaining a minor wound—and to let himself be carried away by it in a wild flight, when—even if he had dared
[385]
— there was no question of fighting, for his weapons were hanging from the saddle of the horse, into whose chest the tiger had sunk its claws. But the beast, which had probably already tasted human blood, was not content with the animal it had brought down to the ground, but pursued the fleeing rider with mighty leaps.

The man had not yet noticed the Tungus, but had shot past him in blind haste, when Scheminga, with the speed of lightning, tore the bow from his shoulder, drew the string back to his ear and loosed an arrow at the monster, which was rushing after its prey in a wild thirst for blood.

The arrow struck the beast in the flanks and penetrated well over a hand's breadth with its sharp, notched iron tip.

The tiger collapsed mid-leap, crouched on the ground, and then cast its glowing eyes about, searching for the new enemy. Its hoarse roar, echoing far and wide, mingled with the shrill hunting cry uttered by the young Tojon, announcing that he had spotted this enemy.

It was the first time that the Tungus had come face to face with the fearsome king of the wilderness. Although he had already taken part in hunts for this bloodthirsty monster—as dangerous to herds as to humans—he had never before come so close to it alone that he could fight it himself. Despite the tiger's initial wound, his situation was a very precarious one, for the well-aimed arrow had by no means rendered the beast incapable of fighting and had merely
[386]
distracted, but only intensified. The slightest resistance from his noble horse would have put the bold hunter in the greatest danger.

Scheminga, however, had not lost his presence of mind for a single moment in this precarious situation.

No sooner had the tiger crouched down to take a leap at his new enemy than a second arrow struck him in the neck. Then the Tojon spurred his mare on, making her take a wide leap to the side, which brought her out of the range of the beast's first attack.

The stranger, who had only become aware of Scheminga's presence through his hunting cry and who, now that the tiger had abandoned its pursuit, had regained control of his own horse and brought it to a halt, watched in amazement – watched in amazement as the Tungus rider galloped in circles around the writhing beast, skilfully evading all its leaps and attacks, often leaping over the tiger itself at the decisive moment, whilst at the same time literally raking its body with arrow after arrow. The sharp arrows were lodged in the animal's flanks and chest; they had pierced its neck and legs, and whilst the raging beast struggled in vain to tear them out, fresh arrows kept cutting through its fur, causing its blood to gush from ten wounds and hindering its movements with their shafts.

At last, the tiger ceased its exhausting attacks, crouching in the middle of the area
[387]
circle marked by its blood, and tried once more to free itself from the arrow shafts with its teeth and paws.

The bold hunter seemed to have been waiting for this very moment. With a single leap, he urged his faithful mare as close as possible to the enemy, and whilst the noble steed reared up on its hind legs, he leaned forward from the saddle – drawing the bowstring back behind his ear – took aim for a few seconds, and then loosed his final arrow at the beast's head.

The tiger let out a furious roar, leapt into the air and tried to sink its bloody claws into the mare's chest. But Tojon, with a firm hand, turned her onto her hind legs to one side, made her take a mighty leap and shot from that perilous proximity.

It had been the beast's final effort. The well-aimed arrow had pierced straight into its eye and through it into its brain – it now fell onto its side, and soon its mighty body stiffened in its final death throes.

Scheminga approached the dying tiger cautiously, for he knew full well what tenacious vitality this fiercest of the feline species possessed, and that often a final swipe of the paw from an animal already believed to be dead had claimed the hunter's life. Pride at his successful deed swelled his chest, and he scarcely considered that, in doing so, he had at the same time
[388]
had saved another's life, as during the fight he had paid no further attention to the fugitive and had long since believed him to be far away. At last he was convinced that the beast was truly dead, and as he drew his knife to remove the arrow-pierced hide from its body, he placed his foot on the animal's head and – remembering the purpose of his adventurous expedition – involuntarily exclaimed:

'It would be better for me, Sultan Timur the Rich, if I were pierced by these arrows and lay in your place!'

A hand rested on his shoulder and a friendly voice spoke to him in the language of the steppes, which in its general form resembles the lingua franca of southern Europe and the Orient:

‘Why should one brave man wish for the death of another brave man?’

The Tojon looked around in astonishment and noticed that the fugitive, whom he recognised by his tattered clothes, was now standing beside him and had addressed him.

He was a young man of about the same age as himself, with a distinctly Mongolian but by no means ignoble countenance, featuring a long, carefully groomed, jet-black moustache and a matching plait on the side of his otherwise clean-shaven head. The stranger regarded him with obvious admiration and sympathy.

‘Who are you?’ asked the Tojon.

‘I am your slave, whose life you saved [389]
, and which now belongs to you. It would have been lost had Buddha[1] not sent his valiant hand.”

‘I should think,’ said the Tungus contemptuously, ‘that your Buddha would have given you hands yourself to defend your life, instead of entrusting it to the nimble legs of an animal!’

The Mongol shrugged with a friendly expression, seemingly without taking offence. “Why shouldn’t a sensible man sacrifice a senseless beast if he can save his life by doing so? My weapons had fallen, along with my horse, into the tiger’s claws.”

The Tojon fell silent, somewhat ashamed, then repeated his question as to who the stranger was, whilst continuing to skin the slain animal.

‘I am a Khalkha. The Tungus and the Mongols of the East are descended from the same forefather. The Khakhan[2] Genghis Khan made both great. Why did the brave Donk wish for the death of a friend in place of this tiger?’

“Timur Khan is not my friend – he is my mortal enemy. Do you belong to his khanate?”

“I am very close to the young Sultan and know all his secrets. He is like a brother to me! But I have never heard that he has an enemy amongst the Tungus.” [390]

Without responding to the interjection, the Tojon turned hastily to the Mongol.
“If you are so close to Sultan Timur, you are probably one of his companions, and he is nearby?”

The Mongol pointed towards the southern end of the lake. “The Sultan is camped there with his servants and herds. I saw his tent as recently as two hours ago.”

‘Well then, Chalchas,’ said the Tungus, throwing the bloodstained tiger skin over the croup of his mare and mounting back into the saddle, ‘if, as you boast, you are held in high favour by Timur Sultan, you can do me a favour in return for my having saved your life.’

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[1] The god of the Eastern Mongolian peoples.

[2] Grand Khan, Emperor.

‘I will slaughter a dog with you and drink its blood,[1] said the Mongol solemnly, ‘if I do not keep my word to you. Whatever you desire from Timur, I shall see to it that he fulfils your wish!’

“Thank you! – Well then, know this: I am . . .”

The Khalkha interrupted him. “You are Scheminga, the Tojon of the Dulegat!”

The Tungus looked at him in astonishment. “How do you know me?”

Smiling, the Mongol pointed to the tiger. “What other archer could have done this? There is only one warrior in the whole universe who shoots better than Scheminga, the Tojon of the Dulegat.”

[391]

‘And who might that be?’ asked the Tungus, jealously.

‘Timur Sultan, my lord!’

“Ah – so here too! Very well – I have come to compete with your lord in archery, and if you truly possess the influence you boast of, and wish to show me your gratitude, then persuade him to face me in a Kutschigera2.”

‘Timur,’ said the Mongol proudly, ‘has never turned down a duel. But I must give him a reason to do so.’

“A reason? Very well – I hate him! Or rather, I must have the thousand camels with which he has come to steal Tolga-Khan’s daughter from the one who has a right to her.”

The Mongol looked at Scheminga with some surprise as they rode slowly back in the direction from which he had come. Then he said with a smile:

“Scheminga Tojon loves the Manshu’s daughter?”

“I don’t think that’s any of your business. Will you carry out my orders?”

“By my head. But Timur Sultan has herds enough. What are a thousand camels to him compared to the life of a friend? He would gladly give them to you if I were to ask him.”

“No, Chalchas,” said the Tojon grimly, “I accept no gifts from my enemies. I challenge him to a fight.”

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“But – if you set a price on your victory, what will you offer?”

“Myself as his slave and – and Melilbi, my mare. There is none like her between the mountains of Nerchinsk and those of Kurdistan!”

It had been harder for him to stake his beloved steed than his own person. The Mongol thought for a few moments, then nodded in agreement. ‘So be it,’ he said. ‘I shall persuade the Khan to accept your proposal, if you wish to dismiss me. Where shall I send word to you?”

The Tojon pointed towards the spot where he had spent the night, which they had now reached, and where his companion had already bridled his horse.

‘Atunga, my arrow-brother,’ he said, ‘will go with you and bring me word. May the battle take place when the sun is directly overhead, so that the shadows are equal. Farewell, and keep your word.’

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[1] A custom of the north-eastern nomads when taking a solemn oath.

[2] A duel with bow and arrow.

The Mongol, having retrieved his own weapons from the torn-apart horse, brandished the knife towards the sun in the custom of the steppe and swore: ‘May the sun let diseases rage within my entrails like this knife if I do not do so! Farewell, Tojon, and may Buddha bless you for what you have done for me this morning!’

He turned his horse round, and soon Atunga, who had been briefed on his mission with just a few words, was galloping alongside him

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towards the Mongol prince’s camp, whilst Scheminga unsaddled his noble mare and roasted his jukola over the embers of the fire.

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The Tojon waited for three hours, then his companion came galloping back. He had found the Mongol prince’s camp already in full preparation for departure; though he had not spoken to the Sultan himself, but from the warrior he was accompanying—who, judging by the general respect shown to him, must have been a favourite of the Sultan—he had received word that Timur Khan was pleased to agree to compete with the most famous archer of the North, and had accepted the terms set forth.

It had been agreed that each of the combatants might shoot three arrows at the other, proceeding entirely in accordance with the fighting customs of his tribe. Should neither warrior sustain life-threatening injuries, a council of the three eldest witnesses to the contest would decide who had emerged victorious. The duel was to take place at midday, near the spot where Scheminga had slain the tiger.

The two Tungus spent the time until their departure making preparations for the contest. As he had completely emptied his quiver during the fight with the tiger, Scheminga selected the three heaviest arrows from his friend’s quiver, sharpened their tips and smoothed the flight feathers. He rubbed and drew the bowstring of his bow

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and washed Melilbi, his mare, for whom he had gathered the fodder himself. Finally, an hour before the sun reached its zenith, the two set off.

They found the site already occupied by the opposing side; indeed, the Khan’s entire camp had been moved there. Vast herds of cattle, sheep and camels were resting in the heat of the July sun. Warriors and herdsmen rode about or loitered idly in the shade of the trees, whilst slaves cooked and roasted food over the fires or hauled water to water the animals.

At one end of a fairly spacious, open area, Timur Khan’s tent had been pitched. It was not like the nomads’ usual travelling tents made of felt, but was fashioned from Chinese silk fabrics and richly draped with colourful pennants and blankets. Scheminga Tojon gritted his teeth grimly at this sight, for it demonstrated to him his opponent’s wealth, and he knew that the precious dwelling was intended as a bridal chamber.

However, he had little time for such thoughts, for as he approached the camp at a gallop, the Mongol whose life he had saved came towards him with a host of warriors

and servants of the Khan, greeted him on the Khan's behalf and invited him to wait in a second tent—which he had had erected at the opposite end of the clearing—until the battle began.

Although this tent was made only of felt and linen,
[395]
not without feeling deeply flattered inside, the Tojon noticed the skull of the slain tiger impaled on a high pole in front of its entrance.

Inside the tent, the two Tungus servants were ready to wash their feet and then serve them tea and all manner of food. The terms of the duel were then discussed once more, and the witnesses and judges appointed. Then the Mongols all left the tent.

The whole manner in which the young Sultan had handled the challenge from his foreign, solitary opponent had something so chivalrous about it that, for all his resentment towards his rival, the Tojon could not help but be won over by him. He was therefore all the more eager to see the Khan, whom he had never before seen and whose wealth and skill with arms had been recounted to him only by the rumours that would probably continue to serve as news in the steppes of Central Asia for a long time to come.

Scheminga Tojon was a valiant warrior and hunter and had often enough demonstrated his courage and his contempt for death. Nevertheless, he was well aware of the gravity of the hour that lay before him, for he knew that the Sultan was not merely his rival in love.

The resounding strike of a Chinese gong gave the first signal.

At this, the young Tojon stepped out of his tent, at the entrance to which Atunga was holding his horse, Melilbi.

He knew that at that very moment, opposite him [396]
his opponent was doing the same. But custom prevented him from glancing curiously in that direction; he occupied himself with inspecting the saddle and bridle. Hanging from the saddle was a small shield made of double walrus hide; he carried a quiver and bow on his back, and had no other weapons.

A second thunderous strike of the gong, and the two combatants swung themselves into the saddle.

Only now did the Tojon cast his first glance at his opponent.

The Sultan rode a magnificent black Turkestan stallion. He himself sat upon the richly decorated saddle as if horse and rider were one. Timur Khan was of slender build – of medium height, like all Mongols – and dressed in loose, colourful robes. He wore loose trousers of yellow silk reaching down to his knees and a white, flowing outer robe. In his left hand he held a small, round metal shield that glinted like polished gold in the sunlight; in his right hand he held the long Tartar bow. The Tojon could not, however, make out his enemy's face, as the ends of the blue veil wrapped around the latter's turban-like headdress hung down over his face. A magnificent, tall tuft of heron feathers rose above the Sultan's turban.

Timur Khan greeted his opponent by pressing his thighs against his well-trained steed to make it rear up, and by bowing his bow before him.
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Scheminga returned the horseman's salute in the same manner with his grey mare, Melilbi. Then the gong sounded for the third time – the signal for the start of the contest – and the horsemen spurred their steeds into a gallop and circled the arena, keeping an equal distance from one another the arena.

This formed a circle approximately one hundred to one hundred and twenty paces in diameter. All around it stood and lay the Khan's numerous servants and attendants. After the two horsemen had demonstrated, through various manoeuvres and feints, the agility of their steeds and their own skill in guiding them, the Tojon suddenly shot into the centre of the circle, drew his bow with lightning speed and fired his first arrow at his opponent. Timur Khan had brought his stallion to a halt with a mighty jerk and, with an equally swift movement, caught the oncoming arrow—which would otherwise have pierced his chest—with his golden shield. A clear clang of the iron tip against the metal attested to the strength of the bowstring and the hand that had drawn it, and a loud cheer of approval for the skill of their own prince burst forth from the circle of spectators.

Scheminga turned his mare to flee, as the rules of these contests dictate, and the Khan pursued him to send an arrow his way in turn.

From that moment on, the contest became a contest of skill, depending not only on the two combatants' proficiency with the bow, but also on the
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agility and manoeuvrability of their horses. Each combatant sought, through a hundred twists and turns, to gain access to his opponent's unprotected side and land his shot there. Whilst the Tojon fled, his face – in the style of the steppes – turned towards the rear, the Khan fired his first shot. But the Tungus threw himself low to the side of his horse, hanging only by his stirrup and the mane, and the arrow whistled harmlessly between the mare's ears.

A shrill cry of triumph from Atunga answered the Mongols' initial cheers. The valiant Tungus strained his throat all the more to make up for the numerical inferiority of his party.

It was Scheminga who was the first to fire his second arrow. Thanks to his mare's agility, he had gained the upper hand on his opponent's right flank, and as he galloped past, he shot the arrow at him from such close range that – had it struck him squarely – the fatal outcome would undoubtedly have been certain.

Kahn had no time left to shield himself with his shield. He saw the deadly projectile whizzing towards him and made a move to catch it with his hand or parry it. This was an exceedingly difficult manoeuvre, one that could only be attempted in the greatest danger and rarely succeeded. Even the Khan, despite his great agility, succeeded only partially; for as he leaned backwards, he was only able to deflect the arrow to one side. The tip flew
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between his arm and his body, and the red bloodstains that instantly stained his white outer garment proved that the Sultan had not escaped the shot unscathed.

A loud cry of lamentation and vengeance from his men filled the air at this sight – but before it had even half died away, the Khan sprang back into the saddle, let out a piercing battle cry and spurred his stallion to a mighty leap that carried him almost to the centre of the arena and straight towards his enemy.

The noble steed stood trembling from the immense exertion, as if rooted to the spot, whilst the Khan raised his bow with lightning speed and loosed his second arrow, which he swiftly followed with a third and final one.

The Tojon had reined in his mare just as he found himself facing his opponent at a distance of barely fifteen paces. The first arrow came so swiftly that he was unable to raise his shield in time to parry it. He saw it flying towards his head and believed himself lost.

But the arrow by no means pierced his forehead; rather, it had been shot with such skill that it struck only the Tungus hero's distinctive helmet-like headdress—the deer's head with antlers—and tore it from his head.

The Sultan's third arrow, however, struck the Tojon squarely in the chest with such force that it knocked him down onto the mare's hindquarters. At first, Scheminga thought he had been pierced and reached for the shaft to tear the tip from his chest. But to his astonishment, he felt in the very next moment that he was free

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and unhindered, and that he was unharmed. He let out a cry of victory, for he knew that his opponent was now defenceless and at his mercy, and as he placed his own third arrow on the bow, he was about to cast aside the Mongol's arrow when his eye happened to fall upon the projectile.

In that instant, the mystery of his rescue was solved – the arrow lacked an iron tip; it was a simple wooden stick with a blunt knob, such as those used in the mock battles of the steppe warriors. The Mongol sultan had fought him only with blunt weapons, whilst he himself had used deadly ones against his opponent. Astonished, he looked up at him – Timur Khan was still standing motionless in the spot from which he had sent the two arrows. He had crossed his arms over his chest after shaking the turban from his head with a swift movement – and looked at him with a steady, serious gaze.

The Tojon recognised those eyes, that face – it was the man he had rescued from the tiger's claws just a few hours earlier.

Now the Tungus man fully understood his rival's chivalrous conduct. A certain sense of shame came over him; then he raised his gaze, as if searching for something to hold on to.

Startled by the din of the battle, a raven had just taken flight from one of the nearest trees and flew cawing across the clearing. Although the bird

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was cutting through the air at a considerable height, far beyond the usual range of an arrow, the Tojon nevertheless raised his bow towards it, drew the string back over his shoulder, and then released his arrow.

Despite the distance, the arrow pierced the bird's breast, and, cawing, it tumbled from the sky down to the ground.

A cry of jubilation from all the spectators, echoing far and wide and mingling with the bellowing and bleating of the startled herds, was directed not only at this masterful shot, but also at the magnanimous deed, for no one in the Sultan's retinue knew how nobly he had behaved towards his challenger.

No sooner had the Tojon seen the bird fall than he leapt from his saddle. But however swift he had been, the young Khan had still beaten him to it and strode towards him, holding out his hand.

'Why should the sons of Genghis Khan fight one another,' he said aloud, 'when they can be friends? My brother need only have said to Timur: "I need your herds," and the Sultan of the Khalkha would have given them to the saviour of his life.'

'No, Khan,' replied the Tungus, 'I do not wish to abuse your gratitude for a chance act of service, which I would just as willingly have rendered to the lowliest of your slaves. I have challenged you to battle because I would rather give up my life than allow you to take Tungilbi as your wife!'

'The Tojon of the Dulegat,' said the Khan with a
smile, [402]
'may the Flower of the Steppe lead him into his yurt. What is a woman compared to a man's life? What are ten such herds compared to the life of a sultan? Let my brother take her and thereby pay the shurun to the miserly Manshu. But let him allow us to remain friends and brothers-in-arms.'

The Tojon extended his hand to him. "With pleasure, valiant Khan," he affirmed. "But nevertheless, I cannot accept your offer. We have not fought with equal weapons. I therefore have no claim to the prize."

'Should I shoot an arrow into the heart of the man to whom I owe my life?' asked the Sultan impatiently. 'Timur Khan had to prove to his friend that he had not fled from the tiger out of cowardice, and the blood he had shed –" he pointed to the graze wound inflicted by the Tungus arrow – "has proven him a brave man. Two warriors have contended for the finest shot – let my elders decide which of us made it!"

The Tojon realised that he had to submit to this ruling. However, it was not carried out immediately; instead, the Khan now invited his new friend to dine with him and his warriors, who had provided him with the honour guard on the now-disrupted wedding procession. In accordance with the custom of the steppe, all the preparations for such a meal had already been made; a cow and two sheep were roasting over large fires, and cauldrons and wineskins filled with strong tea and kumis stood ready for the feast.
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It was only when the feast was in full swing that the Khan raised the matter, and in accordance with his evident wish, the three elders of the company declared that the unusually long-range and accurate shot at the raven must be recognised as the finest of those fired.

But the Khan tried in vain to persuade his new brother-in-arms to accept the entire shurun, assuring him that he had at least ten times as many

animals to graze on his vast steppes; the Tojon remained firm in his stance that he had fought only for the camels demanded by Tolga-Khan, and so Timur was finally forced to yield and order the herder of the two-humped camels to drive the enormous herd forward, whilst the other herds set off once more on their return journey southwards.

As the sun was about to sink below the horizon, the Tojon and his companion prepared to set off in pursuit of the camel herd.

Timur Khan, together with all his servants, escorted him beyond the boundaries of the camp. It is customary at the conclusion of a brotherhood in arms for both parties to exchange gifts. When they had therefore reached the spot where they were to part ways, the young Sultan asked his friend for the bow with which he had slain the tiger, and at the same time signalled to his attendants, whereupon two slaves led up the magnificent, richly harnessed Turkmen stallion which the Sultan had ridden during the duel.

'Mesrur,' said the noble Chalchas, 'having last [404]
carried a vanquished man; from now on, he belongs to the victor. May the earth vanish beneath his hooves! Should Scheminga Khan ever need a friend to help him defeat his enemies, may he not forget Timur Khan.'

The two young warriors shook hands, then one galloped northwards and the other southwards.

———

As we have already recounted, on the evening of the third day the approach of the herds had been noticed in the Manshu Khan's camp, and Tolga was preparing to welcome the Mongol Sultan as his son-in-law and to hand over his daughter to the wealthy Schurun.

Tungilbi was in despair, which grew with every step the herds took towards them. She had sought advice and comfort in vain from the hunting companions of her missing beloved; they knew no more than she did about where her Tojon had gone, and had merely been ordered to wait for him for four days and then return to their homeland. The girl had concealed in her bosom a small Japanese knife with a delicate mother-of-pearl handle, which Scheminga had once given her, determined to use it against herself rather than allow herself to be handed over to the foreign suitor.

Such examples of faithful and self-sacrificing love are to be found in the upbringing of women in the East and in the position which women occupy in the lives of nomads
[405]
—are indeed rare, but they do occur, as manifold examples show, and prove that even under the most unfavourable circumstances, a woman's heart is capable of the heroism of love! –

At last, from the shadows of twilight and the clouds of dust, the countless long necks of the camels rose up and, amidst the shouts and cries of their mounted herdsmen, formed a wide semicircle around the Khan's yurts.

From the circle of the herd, a horseman emerged at a slow pace – he rode a black stallion and led a milky-white mare by the reins.

It was already too dark to make out the rider himself from a distance, but the eye of love was at least sharp enough to distinguish Melilbi's horse in the rider's hand! There could be no doubt now – the Tojon had fallen in battle against his rival, and the Sultan was coming, boasting of his spoils in cruel triumph, to claim his victim. With a cry, she fainted into the arms of the women surrounding her.

When she awoke again, Scheminga was kneeling before her and, defying the custom of the steppes which strictly forbids contact with unmarried women, was covering her hands with kisses. But he found it difficult to make her understand that he had indeed returned with the schurun demanded by her father and had freed her from the suitors of the C[h]alchas Khan.

Whilst the lovers revelled in their happiness [406]
and the women were already composing a kur – a song – in praise of the young Tojon's heroic deeds, old Manshu was busy counting the camel herd with some of his servants. Unfortunately, whilst doing so, he learnt from the loyal retainers who were singing the praises of their Sultan that the latter had offered to present to the Tojon not only the camels but all the herds brought along for the Schurun, and that it was only the Tojon's stubbornness that had caused him to reject these riches.

Tolga-Khan did, in fact, harbour a certain fondness for the chivalrous Tungus, but his avarice prevailed, and the thought of what profit his daughter—or rather, he himself—had missed out on due to the Tojon's foolish generosity soon began to take its toll.

As early as the following day, Scheminga found himself treated with conspicuous coldness; questions regarding the date of the bride's handover were evaded, and finally the Khan hinted to him that, whilst the herd of camels had indeed been most welcome, he was by no means inclined to forfeit cattle and sheep for the sake of a generous whim on the part of his future son-in-law, and that he should first procure these before he could even think of taking his daughter home

In vain did the Tungus appeal to the Khan's words, which had expressly demanded only the herd of camels from him, and offered to send the number of horses he had previously offered – the Manchu claimed to have been misunderstood and persisted in his breach of promise
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with ever-increasing obstinacy on his demand, and to his horror, the Tojon had to hear from his beloved that the old miser had already secretly sent messengers to Timur-Sultan to renew the broken betrothal.

Faced with these circumstances, which once again threatened them, the lovers did not hesitate to make a swift decision.

That very evening, Scheminga sent all his companions away from the Manshu camp under Atunga's leadership, ostensibly to ensure that his father completed the schurun, but in truth to prepare for their escape across the mountains. Fortunately, communication between the Tojon and his beloved remained unhindered,

for the Khan, though himself a man of broken promises, did not believe his young guest would breach the bonds of hospitality. The young man, however – who had previously refused his beloved's suggestion to flee – now felt, due to the Khan's conduct, that he was released from any obligation to show consideration.

The couple had to choose a time when they could gain a sufficient lead before being pursued; for it was foreseeable that such a pursuit would be a matter of life and death. The circumstances were also favourable to them in that the entire camp was due to set off on the very second day in search of new pastures, and in the confusion of that departure, everyone would be preoccupied with their own affairs

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that their absence would not be noticed straight away.

Scheminga knew that everything would depend on the speed and stamina of their horses, on using the correct mountain passes and the fords across the intervening streams, and for that reason he had just sent his companions ahead with precise instructions. Over the past few days, he had tested the Sultan's gift, the stallion Mesrur, on several occasions and had convinced himself that the horse matched his famous mare Melilbi in speed, though not in sure-footedness and stamina. For this reason, he had assigned the mare to Tungilbi, reserving the black horse for himself, which he burdened only with the tiger-patterned blanket.

The lovers had ridden out hunting unhindered on several occasions in recent days, accompanied by a few Manshu. Tungilbi loved to seek out a small lake by the mountains and let her falcon hunt the numerous herons and ducks that made their home in the reeds. On the morning of their departure, whilst everyone was busy packing up the yurts, loading the animals and herding the flocks, Tungilbi announced that she wished to ride to the lake once more, asked the Tojon to accompany her, and rode off, followed by one of her father's servants.

The man was well aware of the nature of the young couple's relationship, and therefore paid little heed to it; it was only when he had lost sight of them on the shores of the lake for quite some time, and

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Tungilbi's falcon fluttered down to him in search of its master, did he become uneasy and ride round the shore of the lake. Upon reaching the other end, he could already see, in the distance, two dark dots moving at lightning speed across the plain towards the mountains. They were the two horsemen. In an instant he understood everything, turned his horse round and galloped towards the camp to raise the alarm. Fortunately for the lovers, the Khan had set out with some of his hunters and now had to be summoned back with the unpleasant news.

Meanwhile, the lovers continued on their way with undiminished haste, seeking first and foremost to gain as great a lead as possible. Since they had to take a detour to avoid the bands of robbers as far as possible, the journey would take more than a week, crossing several mountain ranges that could only be traversed via a few dangerous passes, and rivers that could only be crossed at a few fords.

Scheminga had indeed endeavoured to gather information from the shepherds about the nearest route, but the information was so inadequate that the bulk of the decision had to be left to his own acumen. According to the shepherds' accounts,

the nearest pass was so difficult to find and so inaccessible that only a few of the boldest hunters had managed to cross it. Scheminga would have attempted it with his mare Melilbi alone, but out of consideration for the girl he had to choose the second pass, several miles to the east.
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Neither he nor Tungilbi were familiar with it, and so they had to ride along the edge of the mountains in search of it.

This was precisely where the danger lay: that their pursuers might succeed in catching up with them and cutting them off.

The first day, however, passed without any sign of them. In the evening, the fugitives made camp by the fire they had lit in a sheltered gorge. Tungilbi fell asleep in her husband's arms for the first time.

At the first light of dawn, the refugees set off – they must now have been near the pass, and Scheminga did indeed soon spot the mouth of a valley that seemed to lead uphill into the heart of the mountains. They had been galloping along it for about an hour when they suddenly found their path blocked by a cliff face. Nevertheless, they had to attempt to scale it, for turning back would probably have delivered them into the hands of their pursuers, who must now undoubtedly be hot on their heels.

Tungilbi, on her mare, began the perilous ride, with Tojon following behind her. Indeed, such a daring feat could only be accomplished by two horses as exceptional as theirs, for it involved climbing from one rocky ledge to the next, with every step threatening death and ruin. After two hours of exertion and peril, they finally managed to reach the summit, from which they looked back down into the valley.

In the middle of the valley they spotted a large [411]
swarm of horsemen, who, judging by their threatening gestures, must clearly have spotted them on the heights. To their horror, however, only three or four of them made their way towards the rock face—which was so difficult to scale—in order to cut off their retreat; the others turned into a side pass of the valley, which the fugitives had overlooked in their haste, and which, as they now realised, led up to the heights via a less arduous route, enabling their pursuers to overtake them.

However exhausted their horses were from scaling the mountain face, they could therefore grant them only a brief rest and had to spur them on once more to a wild gallop.

Their path led downhill across a fairly level grassy expanse, whilst some three or four versts away the highest ridge of the mountain rose up, through which a narrow gorge ran. As Tojon had learnt from the shepherds, this was the only route, and they therefore had to reach the entrance before their pursuers. But just as they rounded a small copse of larch trees that blocked their view, they saw the group of their pursuers emerging from the valley floor to their left. Some of them were trying to reach the entrance to the gorge, but the majority were blocking their path in a line.

A few words from Scheminga quickly made the young woman aware of what she had to do. At full gallop, the Khan's daughter charged towards the centre of the

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row – several of the horsemen left their positions and rushed forward to stop her – whereupon, just a few paces before them, she turned her horse to the left and slipped through the gap that had opened up, whilst the Tojon, on the other side, performed the same manoeuvre and rode over the sole Manshu who had had time to stand in his way.

The task now was to reach the entrance to the gorge ahead of the second detachment of their pursuers in a desperate race, and both parties exerted themselves to the utmost.

The mare Melilbi reached the entrance with her beautiful burden at the very moment her master clashed with the leader of the Manshu just before it. A fearsome blow from the Tungus's battle-axe split his enemy's chest, and the horse carried the corpse a short distance further. Then, with a triumphant cry, the Tojon, brandishing the bloodstained weapon, dashed into the gorge, at the entrance to which the pursuers had halted.

The couple's horses, however, were so exhausted that they could now only proceed slowly. Fortunately, darkness soon fell, and under its cover the lovers reached a small side valley where a spring bubbled merrily from the rock. They were able to refresh themselves and the horses at its waters and then rested until the first light of dawn.

Tojon knew that on the third day's journey he would find his friends near a small river
[413]
which flows into the Argun. It was the spot he had designated as their rendezvous, where they were to look for a ford and keep the way clear for him.

The stars were still twinkling in the sky when the pair set off. They could see the watchfire of their pursuers deep in the gorge, but it was not even an hour before they heard them behind them as well.

Scheminga knew full well that the Khan's order spared neither horse nor rider, and that the pursuit was a matter of life and death. Having slain their first leader, if he were captured, death would probably have been his fate as well – or at the very least, slavery. He was determined not to fall alive into the hands of his enemies.

And so the chase continued throughout the day. By midday, the fugitives had left the mountains and entered a plain. The number of their pursuers had dwindled to about twenty of the best-mounted riders; the other Manchus had fallen behind. Twice, the fugitives and their pursuers watered their horses at one and the same stream, barely half a mile apart. The young couple's situation was now worse than it had been in the mountains, for they could no longer hide from the eyes of their enemies, and everything now depended on the stamina of the horses.

The chase now proceeded along the bank of the river—not wide, but swift-flowing and difficult to cross due to its rugged banks—which the Tojon had designated to his companions as the rendezvous point. The two noble animals
[414]
began to show signs of exhaustion after three days' run, and Scheminga looked anxiously for any sign that might indicate the proximity of his friends.

At last he saw smoke rising in the distance on the riverbank.

So that must be the ford; that must be the camp of the six Tungus hunters.

The sight gave them new strength and seemed to invigorate even their horses. But their pursuers, too, redoubled their efforts.

The closer they got to the smoke, the more certain Scheminga became of their rescue. Suddenly, to his delight, as they followed a bend in the river, he saw his six companions, with Atunga at their head, coming towards them from behind a hill.

But that feeling of joy was soon to turn into fresh anxiety.

In a few words, Atunga told him that at the only point where it was possible to cross the river, a sizeable band of Chinese soldiers under the command of a mandarin, on a raid from the Amur, were encamped.

Both the Tungus and the Manchus were, admittedly, obliged to pay tribute to the Emperor of China and thus belonged to his sphere of protection. But the Chinese governors rarely interfered in the internal affairs or disputes of the nomadic tribes, except perhaps in the role of the eagle which snatches the prey of the
[415]
warring falcons, and no one could know whether, or which, side they would take in the present case. It was therefore best to settle the dispute before the matter came within the scope of their decision.

The brief consultation led to a unanimous decision.

The Manshu horsemen did not arrive in a tight formation, but, depending on the quality and stamina of their horses, galloped towards them individually, or in groups of two or three. The aim was to hold them off until the young couple had crossed the river or obtained a promise of protection from the leader of the Chinese patrol corps.

At the head of the Manshu rode a single warrior, followed by three horsemen at a distance of about five hundred paces.

Two of the small band of Tungus broke away, whilst the others continued to escort the Tojon and his young wife—who were allowing their horses to catch their breath at a slower pace—further in the direction of the Chinese camp.

The two Tungus, bows drawn in their hands, stood in the path of the charging Manshu and ordered him to halt. But the man was a brave and powerful warrior; he brandished his spear menacingly and continued to gallop until an arrow pierced his horse’s neck, causing the animal to throw him to the ground. Immediately, his two companions were at his side, and a melee ensued
[416]
between the five warriors, in which the three Manshu were seriously wounded, whilst one of the Tungus was slain. The second, covered in several minor wounds, fled after his companion, pursued by the horsemen who had arrived first.

At a signal from Atunga, two more of the young and resolute Dongi broke away from the small group, which was continuing on its way undeterred, and rushed to the aid of their wounded comrade.

The number of Manshu galloping up and gathering to attack them was exactly double—six—but their horses were weary and sluggish; and so, after exchanging arrows at close range and inflicting two or three

wounds had been inflicted on men and horses, the Tungus, with their fresh and rested horses, threw themselves upon their opponents; they put them to flight despite their numerical superiority, and only found themselves in a melee when the main body of the stragglers came to their comrades' aid.

That, of course, sealed their fate, for after they had killed two of their opponents and rendered four others incapable of fighting, they succumbed to the superior force and all three were slain.

The battle, however, had not only given Tojon and his companions time to advance, but had also aroused the attention of the Chinese; for about thirty well-armed Chinese horsemen were seen setting out from their camp and approaching slowly.
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Their arrival was, of course, bound to put an end to the unequal battle and the pursuit, but the distance was still too great for the Tungus to be able to meet up with them before the Manchus, who had resumed their pursuit, were bound to catch up with them.

The Tojon saw the danger and had made up his mind. Rejecting the offer from his two remaining companions to face the enemies alone once more, he embraced the young woman as she galloped past him, urged her to ride on and, relying on the mare's stamina, to reach the ford and the opposite bank, where she would be safe, and then encouraged his two companions to join him in waging the unequal battle.

The Manshu, now numbering just ten men fit for battle, hesitated to throw themselves upon the three fighters, having already experienced the terrible power of the Tojon's battle-axe; but the thought of the disgrace that awaited them and the fear of seeing their sure prey snatched away by the Chinese soldiers made them overcome even their fear of the young hero, and with a wild battle cry they threw themselves upon the three horsemen, who now found themselves relying solely on the agility of their horses and the strength of their arms.

Tojon had no time to concern himself with his companions, for he alone found himself immediately attacked by five horsemen.

As he was no longer in possession of his bow, [418]
he was unable to neutralise any of them from a distance and now had to withstand their onslaught. The only weapon he carried—having thrown away even his hunting spear whilst fleeing—was his trusty battle-axe. As he threw himself at the nearest horseman, he severed the man's raised forearm at the elbow with a single blow of his axe, the blade cutting deep into the upper arm.

He himself sustained a graze wound to his left thigh from one of the spears.

In retaliation, he killed his opponent's horse. From that moment on, he was barely aware of what was happening. He felt that, in the tangle of men and horses in which he found himself, he was lashing out like a madman and that he himself had been wounded more than once. Then he received a blow to the head with the blunt end of an axe, which caused him to lose consciousness and threw him from his horse. –

When the Tojon regained consciousness, he noticed Atunga, his brother-in-arms, kneeling beside him, busy applying a new bandage to his head with the help of a shaman. He lay on a bed of rushes in front of a felt yurt; several unfamiliar Tungus men and women were moving about him, and amongst them he spotted two of his other companions who had been on the perilous bridal ride, wrapped like him in all manner of bandages made from animal and snake skins and hung with amulets to heal their wounds.

Some distance away, among other horses [419],
the mare Melilbi and Mesrur, the gift from the Mongol Khan. At his involuntary cry—one she knew well—the mare trotted over and licked his face.

But he looked around in vain for any sign of Tungilbi, his wife.

Without asking his comrades-in-arms a single question, he tried to sit up, but a stabbing pain in his arm and leg made him realise that he was seriously wounded and helpless here.

Atunga helped him sit up, whilst, at his gesture, the shaman withdrew.

Now that the spot where he lay was on higher ground, he realised that he was on the left bank of the Abagaitu, the very river whose ford they had been seeking, and directly opposite the place where the Chinese forces had been encamped and near which the final battle had taken place.

But the place was empty; there was no trace of the Chinese to be seen – nor of his enemies, the Manshu.

He turned his head questioningly towards his friend.

‘Where are the long-haired ones?’

“Gone!”

‘And Tolga Khan’s warriors? Has my brother slain them all?’

‘The long-haired ones have sent ten of them back to their homeland so that they may heal their wounds and
[420]
tell the Khan how heavy Scheminga’s hand falls.”

‘Alone?’

“Alone!”

The Tojon clearly hesitated to ask about the matter that was, after all, closest to his heart. At last he plucked up his courage.

“Summon Tungilbi, my wife, to me!”

The Tungus man did not want to hear the question.

‘Scheminga Tojon,’ he said, ‘has lost a great deal of blood; he has been asleep for a long time. My brother may not even realise that today marks the sixth day since we clashed with the Manshu.’

But, having resolved to learn his fate, the Tojon simply repeated his question: ‘Where is Tungilbi, my wife?’

This time the demand was too direct to be ignored.

The Tungus pointed sadly towards the east. “Gone! – the Tergezini[1] have taken her with them!” The Tojon let out a roar like the tiger he had killed barely ten days earlier.

‘What? Have those dogs dared to do this?’

‘They had the upper hand. The Khanum herself, when she saw you in danger, called upon their help and intervention. The horsemen of the Long-Ponytail separated us as we fought for our lives, and led us before the

[421]

Mandarin. He decreed that the Dolgi should return to their territory, and the Manshu over the mountains back to the steppe. Thus, all those whom the God of Death had not yet claimed were brought here. I was the only one to remain unharmed.”

“But what of my wife?”

“The Manshuri[2] have complained that Scheminga Tojon abducted her from her father against his will. The Mandarin has taken her with him until the rights of the husband or the father have been settled.”

“But you followed her trail and know where they ended up?”

“Atunga knew his duty,” said the Tungus simply. “Are we not arrow-brothers? What is the finest wife compared to the life of a man like Scheminga Tojon? In the worst case, the Long-Ponytail may have sent her back to Tolga-Khan’s yurts, and the young warriors of the Dulegat will go and fetch her back. – I tended to my friends’ wounds until, on the third day, Donki from the Tagaun of the Kutschida arrived in this area and came to my aid. Once the Tojon has recovered, we shall search for his wife’s trail.”

Indeed, the Chinese had carefully avoided anything that might have been regarded as an encroachment on the rights of one ethnic group or another, and had respected property rights to such an extent that even the Khanum’s horse was returned to the Tungus.

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Only the young woman herself had been taken with them, as the Mandarin explained, pending a resolution of the injustice done to her.

The Tojon had to console himself with the thought that, once he had recovered, he would assert his claim to her. But unfortunately, weeks passed before, thanks to the shaman’s incantations and his friend’s more effective conventional remedies, he had recovered sufficiently from his serious wounds to mount his faithful mare once more. Then he wasted no time in setting out for the Chinese border forts to enquire after his wife’s fate.

Yet all his efforts were in vain – no one would admit to knowing anything about a captive woman, and even the presence of that patrol was denied with the thousand excuses and subterfuges that characterise Chinese politics, both in major and minor matters. For months he roamed the border regions in vain – even the hope that Tungilbi had been returned to her family or had returned to them of her own accord proved to be illusory; for the scout sent to Tolga-Khan’s camp brought back the news that he knew just as little about his daughter and, indeed, believed her to be in the yurt of the Tungus chieftain.

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[1] Tungusic term for the Chinese.

[2] Manshuri’s: Manshu’s.

In the end, nothing remained but the conviction that the cunning and deceitful Chinese were deliberately covering up all traces of their captives and had probably
[423]
had dragged her into the heart of the vast empire as a slave.

From that time onwards, the Tojon became a declared and dangerous enemy of the Chinese and joined forces with the Muscovites, who were already seeking to expand their territory ever further south and east.

Over time, he took other wives and fathered sons and daughters with them, but the memory of Tungilbi Khanum remained ever alive in his heart. The first foal that Melilbi—the mare that had carried her during their flight—gave birth to by the Turkestan stallion, he sent by trusted messengers as a gift to the magnanimous Sultan of the Khalkhas; in return, whilst lamenting his misfortune, he received a rich gift of precious Tibetan weapons and fabrics—but there was no news whatsoever of Tungilbi Khanum.

Seventeen long years had passed since that bridal step, when the hand of God led me, the stranger born in a distant land, to the banks of the Shilka and, in a wondrous way, restored to the mature man the happiness of his youth once more. –

‘Wéra Tungilbi, my sweet child, pass me the tea bowl, for my throat is parched from this long tale.’

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Although the Holowa spoke French, the elderly Tungus man had followed the heroic ballad of his youth with frequently demonstrated understanding and had grasped the individual,
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passages indicated to him by their names with nods and gestures.

Whilst the narrator refreshed himself with the tea bowl handed to him by his granddaughter—the namesake of the unfortunate Khanum—and the scholar exchanged a few remarks with his young friend and the exile about the adventurous tale and depiction of customs they had just heard, the young Siberian woman used the interruption to further pursue her aims.

‘I feel that I have the blood of Tungilbi-Khanum, your brave beloved, running through my veins, Ame-nikan,’ she said flatteringly to the old man, ‘and I would not hesitate to set out on an equally perilous journey with the man of my choice. But Christian girls, dear father, are not sold for a shurun. It is the custom that they themselves bring the ishi—the dowry—to the man, and I still have none. Your herds belong to your grandsons by your other wives.’

The old man played with her curls with trembling fingers. ‘Did I not give you your mother’s inheritance, those colourful stones that the long-haired ones covet so much?’

‘You promised them to me, but they’re not mine yet. I can’t take what isn’t mine. Why don’t you give them to me as a gift, like the things over there that you’ve brought me?’

‘I have come to give them to you. Scheminga wanted to see Tungilbi’s young face one more time,
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before he lays his head amongst the grasses of the steppe. The next Juani Angani1 will no longer find an old Tojon amongst the living!"

"So you're giving me the pouch with the stones?"

"I'm giving it to you! It's yours!"

The young Siberian girl's eyes sparkled, and she cast a mocking, proud glance at the exile, who noticed it well, though he did not yet know what was going on, as the girl's flattery had been directed at the old man in the Tungus language, which she had now switched to.

"Thank you, Father. May you continue to walk the steppe for a long time yet, to the delight of my wild cousins, rather than rest beneath their grass. Véra Tungilbi will not forget you. 'You see, Diadiuszki,' she turned to the Holowa, 'Father has given me my Ischi – now you too must be kind, and give me something that will win me a husband.'

'Silly child! As if everything I own didn't already belong to you anyway!'

"No, I want an actual present!"

"What, then?"

"Give me that old elephant's head up there?"

'The mammoth skull? Look, the girl isn't stupid! The Uprawitel has already offered me a hundred roubles for it.'

'A hundred roubles?' cried the professor eagerly.

'That [426]

bloke's a scoundrel; I'd gladly pay five hundred!"

'No, learned sir,' said Véra in mock anger. 'You mustn't spoil the deal for me. Well, Daddy?'

"If it makes you happy, Véra, my darling, with pleasure!"

The girl kissed him. "You've all heard it," she said with mocking triumph, pulling a bulging leather bag from her clothes whilst pointing to the mammoth skull, "my daddies have given me this as my dowry! Well, learned sir, if you want that treasure up there, you'll have to marry me!"

The scholar stared in astonishment at the cheeky suitor through his spectacles and turned bright red in the face, whilst the others burst into hearty laughter. Only the exile cast a serious glance at her, for he now knew the precious contents of the leather bag and began to suspect the cheeky game.

'Nonsense! What are you on about, Véra Tungilbi! Don't you know that's not proper for a girl? – You're putting that gentleman in an awkward position.'

"*Oh*, come now, Michael Ivanovich, don't worry about me. I'm afraid I know a thing or two from you that isn't proper for a girl. Why do you want to stop me from making a good match – when you're married yourself, after all?"

The exile flinched at this dig. He [427]

had not realised until then that his bold pupil was aware of this fact about his life; he had only mentioned it briefly earlier in conversation with the Lord in English, a language the girl did not understand after all.

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[1] Summer New Year.

‘You’ll be causing your grandfather needless worry, Wéra Tungilbi,’ he said, frowning. ‘It’s better if you let him tell us his second story, the one that’s supposed to convert me! Judging by *The Bride’s Dance on the Steppe*, we might hear something quite interesting. What do you call your second story, Gospodin?’

‘If it must have a name,’ said the old Frenchman politely but earnestly, ‘I might perhaps call it:

‘THE RUSSIANS ON THE AMUR.’ –”

The professor, who had still not quite recovered from his embarrassment and had been casting various, almost amorous sidelong glances in silence—now at the young, beautiful girl, now at the old, bald mammoth’s skull—quickly pulled out his writing tablet again to take notes.

But the story was not to be told that day; for before Holowa had even prepared to begin, the door was flung open hastily, and, bringing with it wind and snowflakes, one of the katorgi, wrapped in his furs, stepped inside.

‘What is it, Ivan? What do you want here unannounced?’ asked Holowa

sternly. The convict, who, as could be seen by the light,

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bore the dreadful blue mark on his forehead and cheekbones, greeted him humbly.

‘May God and the saints be with you, Father! You must come quickly with your medicine. The Silent One has had another fit, and I fear he will pass away without the holy sacraments.’

The members of the small colony jumped to their feet in alarm.

‘Number Nine Hundred and Eighty, you say?’

“Yes, Father. He’s rolling his eyes like a reindeer calf that’s been stabbed, and the foam is foaming from his mouth like snow!”

‘The poor wretch!’ The old Frenchman hurried to his room and soon returned with a small medicine chest under his arm, whilst Wéra Tungilbi had taken his reindeer-hide cloak from the wooden peg on the wall and was now wrapping him in it.

The exile had likewise risen and signalled to the Lord to do the same.

‘May we come along, Holowa?’

“You know it is forbidden to let strangers near the ‘unfortunates’.”

‘But this gentleman is a doctor; he studied medicine at German universities, and may be able to help better than your simple home remedies; for the government doesn’t provide much in the way of assistance.’

The old colony leader paused for a moment, but the matter was urgent.

‘Very well, then – I shall take responsibility [429]

, for I’d very much like to help the poor man. Come along!”

“You’re going to meet an interesting character,” the exile whispered to the Englishman. “At least pretend you’re a doctor, and you might hear a thing or two that will enlighten you about the Russian justice system.”

He followed the young viscount and the man who had already hurried ahead.

The professor now found himself alone at the end of the table with the old Tungus chieftain and the beautiful girl, and was preparing to deliver a gallant address that would show his erudition in the best light. But Véra paid him no heed, appearing instead to be deep in thought, from which she suddenly snapped out.

'My Bashlik, Mutin! He's hanging behind you.'

The young Cossack, who had already drunk too much, stared at her with glassy eyes.

"But mistress, golden angel, where are you going?"

She stamped her foot impatiently. "Is it any of your business? Obey me!"

The young non-commissioned officer, staggering slightly, humbly brought the fur-lined bashlik.

"Open the door!"

"Gospodina, think of the weather!"

"Paszot!"

He opened the gate – outside, wind and snow were raging – wrapped in her reindeer skins, with the snowflakes

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, the Yakuts slept against the walls like marmots.

The girl darted out into the ice and snow, whilst the learned professor stared after her, his mouth agape.

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A tallow lamp cast a dim light into the cramped, grubby yurt.

On a bed of hard-packed earth covered with an old felt blanket, half-shrouded in a bearskin, lay the unfortunate man, writhing in the throes of the dreadful illness, the man who, that very morning, had bid such a sad farewell to the wandering clergyman.

With the limited experience at their disposal, the Holowa and the Warnak attempted to break the force of the fit: the former held a small bottle of sal ammoniac under the nose of the sufferer—who was convulsing with his eyes wide open and fixed—and poured a few drops of rum through his tightly clenched teeth, – whilst the other tried with all his might to pry open his convulsively clenched hands and straighten his contorted limbs, interrupting his efforts from time to time by making the sign of the cross over himself and the sufferer. –

'The devil take my mother,' said the Warnak, who, having worked himself into a sweat in vain, finally uttered one of those dreadful Russian curses which are used not only by the rough folk but even by the

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the educated – 'I could strangle a bear, and this fellow, who's nothing but skin and bones, won't even let me bend a single finger. But he's a schismatic, a heretic; he's drunk the false holy water today, and the devil is powerful within him!'

'Shame on you, Ivan,' raged old Holowa, 'for linking that unfortunate man with the devil's work simply because he is a Catholic. Am I not one too? – But there are

you – if you really are a doctor, sir, then help us, for our usual remedies won't work this time; the fit is too severe and will cost him his life!" The words were addressed to the young Englishman, who had been standing behind the exile for several minutes and was watching the scene with a shudder.

At being addressed, the Lord forced himself to regain his composure and advised what reason and observation told him.

'First of all, loosen the unfortunate man's necktie; you can see that his face has turned completely blue from the rush of blood. Do you have any mustard oil to hand?'

"Mustard spirit? – No, sir! Here we have sal ammoniac, an emetic, rhubarb and fever bark; that is all the government supplies or that we have."

"Then give me the sal ammoniac. We must rub it into the poor man's chest and back. – He's wearing a black silk scarf round his neck,

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Sir! Would you allow me to try using it?"

The young lord had remembered reading about this remedy.

The exile removed his scarf, whilst the convict tried to pull the coarse woollen shirt off the sick man.

The sight that met their eyes was horrifying.

The body of the unfortunate convict was gaunt and resembled more a skeleton covered in skin. But this skin bore, stripe upon stripe, on his chest and back, deep scars bearing the marks of those terrible forms of ill-treatment which are still legally permitted in the Russian judicial system to this day.

At first, the Lord did not understand what these deep red scars meant.

'Good heavens, the poor man looks as if he's been tattooed!'

The exile laughed. "What, My Lord, you were an attaché at the embassy for a year and you don't know what these marks mean?"

"Impossible! – surely they aren't – – –"

"Caning and whipping! Well, what else? The lad is a Pole and has probably earned them as the reward for a mutiny!"

The lord turned away in displeasure from this cold indifference. He took the black silk handkerchief and draped it over the sufferer's face. At the same time, he gently stroked the veins on his wrists.

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Within a few moments, an almost miraculous effect became apparent. The convulsions subsided and gradually ceased altogether – the limbs regained their natural suppleness, and the Katorgi managed to open the sick man's hands.

One of the hands had convulsively concealed a small object in its palm, which rolled onto the floor when it was opened. Only the exile and the Englishman noticed it; the former placed his foot on it and then picked it up, whilst the Holowa and the Wornik attended to the patient.

He then beckoned the Lord over to the lamp and examined the object by its light. It was an iron signet ring.

'Let us see,' said the Russian, 'I believe we shall find the solution to the riddle and the number here. – Correct – there is the inscription "*Królestwo* polskie" – Kingdom

Poland! – with the defiant single-headed eagle and below it – ha! I almost knew it! Command of the 9th Regiment – and here inside, the letters *P. W.* – as surely as the devil may take my soul – it is Colonel *Wysocki*, of whom nothing has been heard since he was taken to Akatuga Fortress!"

"Wysocki – I vaguely remember the name! – Wasn't he a brave officer and one of the leaders of the 1830 uprising?"

'You mean the revolution! – That's right! Before 1830, Peter Wysocki was a lieutenant and commander of the

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Division School in Warsaw and one of the leaders of the revolution. As a colonel in the 9th Regiment, he was wounded during the storming of Warsaw on 7 September 1831 whilst defending the Wola redoubts; he was taken prisoner by the Russians and brought to St Petersburg. There, after a lengthy trial, he was sentenced to death, but by the Tsar's clemency was instead sentenced to life's imprisonment in the mines of Nertczyńsk. I heard there that he arrived in 1833, along with several of the other Polish fools who believed their scythes could stand up to Russian cannons, or that France and England had anything more to offer them than empty promises! Suffice it to say that he was treated no worse in the mines than others; indeed, I have been told that he was even treated with deference due to his rank and standing. Yet for Wysocki the situation remained unbearable, and as there was no other prospect of changing it, he considered escape. The difficulties of such an escape, however, are almost insurmountable, particularly for political prisoners, and not everyone has Piotrowski's good fortune and perseverance.[1] Nevertheless, he found like-minded comrades who were willing to share the risk, and since no one knew the routes through the mountains, they entrusted themselves to a farmer who would guide them for a

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good reward, did indeed collect them and take them to a specified location, but then turned back, betrayed them and brought soldiers to the scene. After a furious battle, in which Wysocki was wounded, they were all recaptured. Wysocki, as the leader, received 1,500 lashes. An eyewitness to the horrific execution told me that he was carried lifeless into the infirmary. Yet Father Sierocinski was still breathing at the execution in Omst when the count reached four thousand, and only the final three thousand were counted against his corpse—or rather, his fleshless bones! Wysocki was indeed cured, and after his recovery he was taken to Akatuja Fortress, where only incorrigible criminals are sent and where they are treated with the utmost cruelty. Here he was forced to perform the hardest manual labour. He often fell ill – as I heard and have now ascertained – with epilepsy, which had afflicted him as a result of that ill-treatment; he never spoke a word, was gloomy and sullen, and even shunned the company of

[1] Allusion to the now-famous escape undertaken by the Polish émigré Rufin Piotrowski from the Yekaterynskaya colony in the Tobolsk Governorate in July 1845, and which he undertook via Arkhangelsk and St Petersburg, travelling almost entirely on foot to Königsberg in Prussia, where he arrived a year later, with superhuman endurance.

His soul was dominated by hatred of the other prisoners and mistrust of the whole world. His proud, fiery heart was broken, not by the sentence to Siberia, but by the degrading beatings with a cane."

'And when was this appalling crime committed against such a brave man?'

'Crime?' said the exile with a scornful laugh. 'Siberia would never be populated if the strictest penalties were not imposed for every attempt to escape.

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But, to answer your question, My Lord, it must have been in the year 1837 or 38."

"Merciful God – so he has been carrying his suffering with him for 23 long years? But how did he come here?"

"I heard thirteen or fourteen years ago that he had been transferred to Irkutsk. He must have been pardoned and sent to Posiel[i]enie since then, and here we have come across him. It's a pity I didn't come to this realisation sooner, but as I said, he rarely spoke a word and kept his distance from everyone."

They had discussed this in English on the other side of the yurt; their attention now turned back to the sufferer.

The fit seemed to be over; when Holowa lifted the cloth, the sufferer's eyes were seen to be closed – the bluish colour of his face gave way to a dark redness, and thick beads of sweat were rolling down his forehead. The convulsion had not been followed by a complete loss of strength, but – more dangerously than that – by a paroxysm of fever.

His mouth had opened; the sick man stretched out his right hand as if giving a command.

'There – there – out of the gunpowder smoke! There they come! Forward, brave Cossacks, mow them down like the stalks of the harvest they are trampling underfoot. Fire, lad – fire at them! There – that green-coated man on the horse – you fool, how could you miss! – Hand me the rifle! – I know him well, that devil – Colonel Apraxin, the

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seduced Helena! – Go to hell, scoundrel! – *Zgie Polska!*«

The delirious man's shrill cry made his listeners tremble. The heat of his fever had transported the poor wretch back to the heroically defended ramparts of Wola. But just as swiftly the image shifted in his wild dreams.

'*Bez poszczadi!*[1] – yes, I know that word,' he roared. 'Strike me – drink my blood, –

arms wide apart, right foot forward! You wretched, foolish minions of the tyrants, who don't even know how to fight! *Pokrepsze! pokrepsze!*[2] Scoundrels!"

He fell silent, exhausted – a shiver ran through his emaciated form, then the flush receded and a deep, waxy pallor spread across his gaunt face.

'Holy Virgin,' whispered Holowa, 'I've never seen him like this before; after the fits, a deep calm would usually set in – he'd lie there as if dead!'

'It seems to me he'll soon be lying like that again,' whispered the exile, 'but for real. – Look – he's coming round!'

The sick man opened his eyes and looked around. The ghastly rigidity of the convulsion had vanished from his gaze, yet there was no trace of feverish fervour to enliven him – he was merely infinitely weak and, at first, bewildered.

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[1] Without mercy – a dreadful, occasional addition to the judgements.

[2] Harder! Harder!

[438]

‘Where am I – what has happened – I – I was ill, very ill!’

‘You’ve had your fit, *brother*,’ said Holowa sympathetically, ‘unusually severe this time, but, thank God and the saints, it’s happily over and you’ll soon recover. Wéra Tungilbi is to cook you some soup – I’m exempting you from all work for the next week!’

The Pole smiled painfully. “God will see to it – I can feel it in my heart – but thank you, Holowa, you’re a good man, even if you’ve become a Russian!” He laboriously held out his emaciated hand to him.

“Sleep, *my friend!*” the old Frenchman urged kindly. “We’ll leave so that you can get the rest you need. Ivan will keep watch over you. There’s an English doctor here – a distinguished gentleman – he’ll visit you again tomorrow.”

The unfortunate man shook his head quietly. “His visit would be in vain,” he whispered – “I feel that it is all over for me; I am dying!”

‘God forbid! – But it is a comfort to me, nonetheless, that the holy man was with us yesterday. Have you received absolution and the Holy Sacrament?’

‘The Body of the Lord?’ – ‘No, he would only give it to those who forgive,’ cried the sick man vehemently, as he tried to raise himself up on his arm, – ‘and

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I am to forgive my executioners, I, whose homeland has been trampled underfoot by the Russian Tsar? – Never!”

‘For the sake of the saints, man, do not speak like that!’ pleaded Holowa. ‘There are strangers here, and you know that a terrible punishment awaits such blasphemy.’

The Pole laughed bitterly. “Your punishment? What do I care about that now? – But didn’t you say there was an Englishman here – I heard about the foreigners –”

“This gentleman, whom Véra rescued from the blizzard with God’s help, is a distinguished gentleman, a lord!”

‘Then quickly, quickly! – Here – Ivan, man, clear the earth away from under my head. It’s frozen; take your axe!”

“What’s all this about?”

The sick man paid no heed to the warden’s question, whilst Wornik did indeed follow his instructions; he turned to the other two men.

‘Who will perform the final rites for a dying man?’ he asked in French.

‘I will!’ said both of them.

‘No – not you, Number Twelve Hundred and Four! – You are a Russian; you betray your own country and have no conscience. Your name, sir?’

“Frederik Walpole, Viscount of Heresford!”

“Are you returning to Europe?”

“I am on my way there!”

With unusual strength, the sick man pushed Wornik away; Wornik had broken up the earth and begun to dig in it.

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‘No – not you!’ – He reached in with his gaunt, trembling hand and, after a few moments, pulled out a small, letter-shaped parcel wrapped in reindeer hide. ‘Will you take this

will of Peter Wysocki, Colonel of the 9th Regiment, to the Polish émigrés in Paris?"

'Stop, My Lord – I cannot bear it!' cried Holowa – 'and you, wretch, be silent! How dare you utter your name before everyone?'

"The hour has come when I can thunder it out before the throne of God in the face of your Tsar! – Stand back, Holowa! – As I heard ten years ago from an unfortunate compatriot – a son of my youngest sister, Count Oginski, is alive! – so to him or to Prince Czartoryski! – Will you swear, sir?"

The Lord hesitated for a moment. "Unless the authorities of this country snatch it from me by force – you have my word on it!"

'Clauses! Clauses! And I have written it in my own blood – a secret – the legacy to my country –' groaned the sick man, clutching the small parcel convulsively to his chest, as if to protect it there.

"Give it to me, Colonel Wysocki!" said a firm, clear voice. "I swear to you, my hand will either deliver it to its address or destroy it!"

"You?"

The dying man looked with sparkling eyes at the [441]
speaker, towards whom the witnesses to the scene had turned in astonishment.

It was the young Siberian woman standing between them.

"You – Véra – how can you? – – –"

'I swear to you, Colonel Wysocki – I shall be in Paris before a year has passed, and I shall place the will in her hands!'

Old Holowa collapsed groaning onto a stool and stretched out his hands, "Child, unfortunate child – are you going to leave me?"

"I will! – Do you want me to?"

The Pole handed her the parcel with a heavy arm. "I know you – you will keep your oath! God bless you!"

"I don't believe in Him! – Ask your fatherland – your own fate!"

The dying man raised himself convulsively and stretched his arm upwards. "And yet he lives – there! there! His hand will come, however late it may be! – *Zgie Polska! zgie Polska!*"[1]

The final cry died away between his twitching lips – he fell heavily back onto the bed of frozen earth – he was dead!

FOREVER UNDIVIDED!

In a fine house on Amalienstraße, which belongs to the less bustling but aristocratic part of Copenhagen, near the magnificent Kongens Nytorv – the King's New Market – two men were engaged in earnest conversation in a fairly spacious study, furnished with the utmost comfort. Both were dressed in sumptuous uniforms, in *full regalia*, as though they were about to attend some official or court ceremony.

[1] Long live Poland!

The elder of the two was seated on a sofa upholstered in dark English velour; he held a copy of the Berlin Nationalzeitung in his hand and would occasionally glance at it during the conversation, as though he wished to draw fresh material from it. He was a man of medium height and corpulent build, on whom the gold-embroidered uniform looked rather ill-fitting; he had delicate white hands adorned with diamond rings, which he seemed to take some pride in, for he often raised them to his eyes, and
[443]
an aristocratic face, finely chiselled despite his general corpulence, which bore sparse sideburns that were already turning distinctly grey. His hair, too, was grey and thin, combed back over a somewhat narrow but high forehead. On the whole, his appearance gave a disharmonious impression, as his head and body did not match at all.

The opposite was true of his companion, who was a man of about twenty-nine to thirty years of age, tall, slender and yet of a sturdy build. His face was plain, with a broad, pensive forehead and flared nostrils, sometimes – and certainly in this case – the hallmark of ambition. He had grey eyes that looked shy and pensive, narrow cheeks and a strong chin that matched his forehead. The stuffy air of the office and the study may well have sapped his originally fresh complexion and already etched the first traces of wrinkles on his forehead and around his eyes. He, too, wore a civil servant's uniform, though with less embroidery than the other gentleman.

'The simple-minded rabble of the People's Party,' said the latter, 'will soon be cheering Mr Blixen-Finecke, whom they have so often attacked; you may rest assured of that. The fools really imagine that the change of person in the Minister of the Duchies also signifies an intended change of system. As if Wolfshagen[1]
[444]
had not already put his plans to the test in Schleswig! The only difference is that the Chamberlain knows even better the course we must consistently follow.'

'I do indeed fear that we are proceeding too hastily; Jörgensen[2] is downright Schleswig!'

'What does that matter? – We cannot count on the current generation anyway; they are entrenched in their German identity and have been brought up that way. For them, the government can only resort to severity and unforgiving punishments. We shall surely still find ways to break the defiance of these knights and peasants. Our main task remains to influence the education of the younger generation and to instil in them from the very outset the awareness that they are Danes – not Germans. In this regard, Councillor of State Regenburg[3] is exactly the man for the job; his measures are excellent and the system of mixed districts is already yielding positive results."

'You know what cause for complaint this very matter gives rise to within the German Confederation!'

The Conference Councillor laughed. 'The German Confederation! If only we were as certain of anything as we are of its resolutions.'

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[1] The newly appointed Minister for Schleswig-Holstein.

[2] At that time, Chief of Police.

[3] Head of the Department for Church and Education.

‘Do not take the matter so lightly. I know the German character; I’ – the speaker hesitated for a few moments and his face flushed slightly, his eyes cast down to the floor – ‘I am
[445]
half-German myself and know that it takes a long time to reach a decision over there, but once one finally does, one carries it out.”

‘For the time being, you are not a German, but a North Frisian,’ said the Conference Councillor rather sternly to the young civil servant, ‘and scholarly authorities such as Professor Allen[1] have amply demonstrated that the Frisians are not a German but a Danish tribe. You must completely abandon such notions if you wish to advance your career and count on my daughter’s hand. Remember that the mission entrusted to you on my recommendation requires a thoroughly Danish heart, and let us return to this matter in detail once more, so that this evening, when it is discussed in the Countess’s private chamber, you may appear tactful in every respect.’

‘You know,’ said the private secretary firmly, ‘that I am Danish out of conviction. That reference to a historical dispute should not cast the slightest doubt on my loyalty.’

‘I know that – and that is why you are in this position. So, to the matter at hand. The London Protocol, by which the shameful rebellion of ’48 to ’51 was finally suppressed by force of arms, has unfortunately given the German cabinets some leverage to interfere in our affairs, and the unfortunate statement by the Minister of 29 January 1852, from
[446]
Austria and Prussia reinforced these pretexts in a way that certainly compels us to exercise some caution. Of the other signatories to the London Protocol, England, Russia and France have not the slightest interest in standing in the way of our intentions to finally grant the duchies their own statehood; on the contrary, they are quietly on our side. Emperor Louis Napoleon himself does not believe in the slightest in the ‘nationality’ deception he himself instigated. It is precisely these nationalities that are a misfortune for any strong government. France will not hesitate for a moment to ‘Frenchify’ Nice and Savoy, just as it has ‘Frenchified’ Alsace and Lorraine. England is doing the same with Ireland and India; Russia with Poland; and the time will come when even its German Baltic provinces will have to fall victim to this principle. Austria’s greatest weakness is its deference to its numerous nationalities, and Prussia, in truth, has no reason whatsoever to accuse us, for it Germanises Posen just as much as we Danishise Schleswig and Holstein!” –

‘Just a little more cautiously!’ interjected the legation secretary with a smile.

‘Perhaps! Nor is it being pushed as hard as we are. I merely mentioned all this to draw your attention to the fact that we are doing nothing more than other governments. The current generation in Holstein and Schleswig—or, to put it more accurately, in South Jutland—may have cause to complain about us; but a foreign government does not. The
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[1] In his *History of the Danish Language*.

German Confederation would do better to concern itself with quite different matters that lie ahead – ” the Conference Councillor raised the German newspaper significantly, – “rather than with our affairs. A war with Denmark would very easily serve to lay bare the utter incompetence and instability of this Confederation and would probably prompt the two major German powers to dissolve the existing arrangements, or even to do away with the small states altogether.

Here is the report from the *Berliner Nationalzeitung* on the resolutions and deliberations of the so-called German National Association in Coburg on 3 and 4 September. It openly calls for the formation of a unified central authority with supreme military command and exclusive representation in foreign affairs; and in doing so, it is not merely the Prussian members—Amelung of Stettin, von Unruh and others—but even South German democrats such as Metz and his associates who are openly demanding that Prussia assume sole leadership, to the exclusion of Austria. Thank God the current Prussian statesmen are not vigorous or dynamic enough to capitalise on this movement, and the conservative and official press are attacking it with all their might. But I tell you, my young friend, should Prussian ambition ever be fortunate enough to see a man of courage and energy placed at the head of the government, who makes this programme the banner of the Ministry and thereby brands the current opposition movement as loyal and conservative, by
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throws the current democrats a bone in the form of a German people’s parliament – then it will be the end of the Bundestag and the sovereignty of the small and medium-sized states, and we shall witness astonishing developments that pose a grave threat to ourselves and indeed to the states of Europe as a whole. Please draw attention to this. – That is the point of view you are charged with putting forward to the relevant authorities during your mission.’

The legation secretary bowed in agreement.

‘Your task, therefore, is to sound out the courts of Mecklenburg, Dresden and, in particular, Hanover and Kassel, and to set out the danger that must inevitably arise should Prussia permit any interference whatsoever, or indeed be entrusted with the demanded execution. People in Berlin are now vying for popularity, and a war with Denmark might well be most welcome as a means of proving the worth of this alleged reorganisation of the army.

Moreover, Mr von Quade has given us a hint that, in response to our statements at the Confederation, a memorandum is being prepared in Berlin concerning the alleged oppressions in Schleswig, and I do not believe I am mistaken in thinking that the local Prussian Consul-General, Quehl—once Manteuffel’s right-hand man—has been tasked with gathering evidence for this. He is currently roaming about Schleswig under all manner of pretexts, without us being able to prevent him. It is now a matter of importance to His Majesty’s Government to obtain reliable information about the intended memorandum in good time, so as to be able to counter it, and if the Marquis Moustier
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was able to obtain the plans for Sevastopol from Frederick William IV’s cabinet with such ease, it should surely not be so difficult or costly to take a peek into Mr von Schleinitz’s files. Anything is possible with a pair of beautiful eyes. So prove yourself a skilful diplomat and set all the mines exploding. You know that your

successes in Berlin and Hanover that your appointment as Legation Councillor and Edda's hand depend.'

'When you speak of me, *dear Papa*,' said a bright, clear voice, and through the door she had just opened appeared a tall, slender woman in elegant evening dress, – 'I'm here! – I think it's time, and the carriage is waiting.'

At the sound of the voice, the Legation Secretary had turned round quickly, delighted to see the diplomatic instructions thus concluded, and had gone to meet the lady, taking her hand and raising it to his lips, whilst his eyes lingered admiringly on her beautiful figure.

'You look lovely today, *Edda*, and have chosen the most charming outfit – just to make my farewell twice as difficult,' he said tenderly.

'Then do keep this image safely in your memory,' said the lady lightly, 'to arm yourself against the beautiful eyes in Berlin. But would the gentlemen now be so kind as to take their leave? I have no desire to be the first, nor, for that matter, the last!'

The beautiful, proud lady was the daughter of
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Councillor *Halsteen*, to whom she bore little physical resemblance. She had inherited her tall, slender figure from her mother, a Swedish woman, née Countess Tordenskiold. Upon her somewhat long, slender and exceedingly delicate neck—the skin of which one might have said, as the poets and historians of that time reported of the beautiful Philippine Welser, that one could see the blood pulsing—sat an ideal head of a calm, serious beauty. There was pride and reserved dignity in the expression of her features and her firm, dark-blue eyes. The small mouth, with its narrow lips, was closed and had a somewhat stern appearance. Only the nostrils of the straight nose, which ran down from the pure brow in a Greek line, were rosy and wide open, and at times their movement betrayed an inner, more fiery life than the calm outer appearance would suggest.

The light brown hair, of great fineness, was gathered at the temples and forehead by a narrow golden headband into a half-Chinese, half-Greek hairstyle, which suited the serious expression of the face, with its delicate but by no means sallow complexion, very well. In perfect harmony with this, a light-blue silk dress, trimmed with white edging on the sleeves and bodice, clung to her slender figure, whose only adornments were a simple gold bracelet in the English style and a long, delicate Venetian chain.

'Come along then, children,' said the Councillor. 'Edda is right, it is indeed time, and I must confess – I'm rather fancying some of those fresh
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Husum oysters, which always form the entrée at the Countess's, and the delicious Chablis served with them. It is a prejudice to think that only in Paris do they know how to dine well – I maintain that here in the north, in particular, one dines more elegantly and better!" As he spoke, he had entered the large drawing room adjoining his study, where a servant was already holding the couple's coats and cloaks by the door opposite.

The legation secretary had just draped the elegant ermine mantilla over the lady's shoulders and offered her his arm to escort her to the carriage, whilst the Privy Councillor was already wrapped in his coat, when another servant poked his head through the door and exchanged a few words with his colleague.

‘What is it, Jean?’ asked the host, as the party was already making their way towards the door.

‘There’s a man here, sir; he wishes to speak to the Legation Secretary.’

‘Why didn’t you turn him away?’

‘He was determined to come up – I told him that the Legation Secretary was not available, but he would not be turned away.’

‘He may come back tomorrow morning,’ said the Conference Councillor irritably, and was about to step out through the door that the servant had left half-open. ‘Mr Hansen simply doesn’t have time right now!’

‘Not even for a brother?’ asked a clear, resonant voice from outside.

The Legation Secretary stopped in his tracks and instinctively
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the lady’s arm. “Brother? – By God, that’s Klaus’s voice! – Is it really you?”

His old, more natural affection prevailed over all considerations of propriety and formality; he pushed the Conference Councillor and the servant aside, and in the next moment was in the arms of a tall, strapping man standing in the entrance hall in simple but neat sailor’s clothes.

The Councillor had stepped back with a rather annoyed expression, shrugged his shoulders and cast a glance at his daughter, whom he felt had been offended by her fiancé’s behaviour, before examining the new arrival himself through the glass.

The man stood a full six feet tall in his shoes – for such were indeed the sturdy, good-quality sailor’s shoes he wore, – as he now straightened up from his brother’s arm, though – paying little heed to the distinguished surroundings – he kept both of his brother’s hands clasped in his own and regarded him with warm glances that gradually took on a certain good-natured mockery.

The stranger was a stately man of about 27 or 28 years of age, thus some two years younger than his brother. He had his brother’s tall stature, perhaps two or three inches taller, but was far broader and more powerfully built, entirely in proportion to his height. His hands, ungloved, not misshapen but strong, showed that he had never shied away from work, but had himself valiantly
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where it was needed. His face was masculine and open, framed by a reddish-blond beard, and possessed an air of extraordinary vigour and resolve, and the open, cheerful gaze of his large, bright eyes—which now rested with the look of love upon his long-missed brother, above his short, attractively curved nose and full lips revealing two rows of magnificent teeth—instilled an involuntary favourable impression of him.

Klaus Hansen, as already mentioned, wore the stately attire of a sailor: loose trousers and a jacket of dark blue cloth—not fine, but of good quality—a red silk Chinese sash wrapped around his hips beneath the jacket, and a black scarf tied in a sailor’s knot around his colourfully striped shirt collar and sturdy neck. The lacquered sailor’s cap with its long black ribbons had fallen to the ground during the stormy embrace, revealing his forehead—not high but broad—framed by short, curly blond hair. An almost sharp line on this forehead marked the boundary between the lower part of his face—tanned brown by the tropical sun and the effects of harsh weather—and the upper part, where, above the line formed by the brim of the hat, the colour of the

forehead appeared almost girlishly white. A broad, pale scar ran clearly visible along this line towards the left temple and disappeared into the curly hair.

‘Blixen, Jan,’ said the sailor in the Frisian dialect, keeping his brother at arm’s length, ‘what a fine lad you’ve become in those seven
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years since I’ve seen you! Just a bit narrow-chinned and spindly-legged from all that learning and paperwork, and I bet you can’t even row a dinghy through the surf! But God bless you, brother – even if you’re wearing a jacket as laden with gold as the Sultan of Mysore’s robe, and certainly far too tight for the limbs of an honest lad from Westerland! – ‘But excuse me,’ he continued in proper High German and not without a certain free-spirited flair, noticing his brother’s increasingly embarrassed expression and only now taking notice of the two people accompanying them, – ‘Excuse me, madam, for barging in here like a clumsy sailor before Mars. This is my only brother, whom I have not seen for seven years, and my heart is overflowing like a storm surge over the dykes of our Halligen!’

‘Ah,’ said the Conference Councillor, who had already taken a pinch from his golden snuffbox twice during the brief scene, ‘so this is the younger brother of our young friend, the Legation Secretary—of whom we have heard that he has devoted himself to the national merchant navy? How very much we regret that, at this very moment, our time does not permit . . . “

The young lady did not let him finish. With a proud wave of her hand, she interrupted him and took a step back into the drawing room.

‘But Mr Hansen,’ she said, ‘you will surely not leave your brother standing here in the doorway. Please, come closer, sir, and let
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stay with us for a few moments, until this budding diplomat has recovered from his surprise enough to escort you to his flat.’

The legation secretary blushed at the reproach. “It’s true – I’d completely forgotten! You’re staying with me, aren’t you? – But for heaven’s sake, where have you come from – without any warning and at this very moment?”

“I didn’t realise this time would suit you any less than any other,” remarked the sailor rather dryly. ‘I’ve just come from the East Indies—or rather, from Schleswig on our uncle Barthelsen’s barque, as his helmsman is ill, I had nothing better to do, and I wanted to see you again after such a long time. But don’t worry, I’m sure I’ll find somewhere to stay at the harbour and will come back when you return from your visits.’

“Mr Hansen,” the Privy Councillor interjected, “is, unfortunately, invited to dine with us today at Her Excellency the Countess von Danner’s, and as there is a small gathering after dinner, it is likely to run very late.”

“I shall stay here; please excuse me!”

‘What are you thinking, my dear son – that is out of the question. Do remember that your absence on this final evening, when there is still so much to discuss, could bring you into the greatest dis favour! – But you haven’t even introduced us to your brother yet.’ [456]

The poor legation secretary could not extricate himself from the embarrassment caused by the surprise.

‘Forgive me,’ he said at last, regaining his composure. ‘Dear brother, I have the honour of introducing to you my most benevolent patron and fatherly friend, Mr Halsteen, the Conference Councillor, who has honoured me with the kindest welcome into his family, to which we shall, I hope, with the consent of this lovely lady’ – he gallantly took Edda’s finger and pressed a kiss upon the delicate glacé – “will soon belong even more closely to them through this beautiful hand, which has been promised to me.”

‘What, you’re engaged?’ asked the sailor in astonishment, ‘neither Mother nor Uncle told me anything about that!’

‘It was my wish,’ remarked the Conference Councillor, ‘that the engagement should not be spoken of until it had been proclaimed at court with the highest approval of His Majesty and the Countess von Danner.’

The young man cast a puzzled glance at his brother and shook his head.

‘With her permission? What on earth does this woman have to do with your marriage? – ‘But if I am truly to have the good fortune, fair lady,’ he said, turning to the young lady, and a full gaze from his honest, open eyes fell upon her beautiful face and met hers – ‘to welcome you in future as my dear relative, then, for my brother’s sake, please forgive this unruly sailor’s rough manner and
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allow him to ask that you regard him as a devoted brother.”

He had taken her hand and was squeezing it warmly. Despite his free-spirited manner, which so little conformed to the conventions to which she was accustomed, her large eyes rested not unkindly, indeed with interest, upon his honest face, and a slight blush spread across hers as she gently returned the firm squeeze of his hand.

‘Although I do not yet have the honour of calling myself your brother’s fiancée,’ she said kindly, ‘I may surely make use of the rights that this title will confer upon me to the extent of welcoming you warmly and ensuring at once that everything is arranged for your accommodation in your brother’s flat, which is situated above ours. Please excuse me for a moment; I’ll be right back!”

‘But Edda,’ repeated the Councillor, ‘the carriage—’

“Let it wait!” She hurried to the door and opened it, but recoiled with a soft cry when she saw before her a face of a bronze hue tinged with green, made even darker by the white turban covering the closely shaven skull, which grinned at her with sparkling eyes and a wide mouth revealing rows of pointed teeth.

The strange-looking figure was, apart from the turban, dressed in the usual sailor’s uniform: a red woollen shirt under a blue jacket, but in the wide yellow
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silk shawl wrapped around his hips was a long Malay knife of a most dangerous-looking sort.

At first glance, the young lady had failed to notice that the grim stranger was carrying a very well-filled, unassuming travel bag in his hand.

‘For heaven’s sake, who is this?’

“Sahib Hansa, my master, lovely missus!” grinned the Green Man.

The sailor had looked round at the shout and was now laughing heartily.

“Forgive me, Miss, if the lad has startled you. It is *Suky*, a Laskar and my servant—a perfectly good lad, even if he still looks a bit wild from his old trade as a pirate in the Indian Ocean. I owe him this scar across my forehead, and in return I made him my prisoner.”

“What? And you let that murderer run about as your servant?” asked the legation secretary, whilst the lady, having recovered from her brief fright, hurried past the dangerous stranger to issue the promised orders.

“Bah – why shouldn’t I? Suky has become a quite splendid steward and a capable sailor to boot, who has shown me the greatest devotion ever since I saved his life from the cutlasses and pikes of my own men.”

“So you have survived a battle with Malay pirates?” asked the Privy Councillor, who realised he would have to be patient.

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“On the voyage from Singapore to Canton, when I was in command of the English brig ‘Clary’.”

The legation secretary looked at him in surprise. “What, Brother Klaus, you’re a captain?”

“My old, brave Stafford died of cholera in Singapore, and as I was first mate on board, I took command of the ship. The shipowners in Liverpool offered me continued command on the return voyage, and the East India Company also wanted to give me a ship following that little incident in the Strait of Malacca, but I was driven by a longing for my old Hallig islands, which their children can never forget! So I went to Hamburg, first took my captain’s examination and – here I am!”

‘As far as I know, there is also an examination board in Copenhagen for the subjects of the state,’ remarked the Conference Councillor, not without a touch of sharpness.

“That may well be – we from the Frisian Islands rarely come here and stick to our own kind!”

“And when did you return from India?” asked the Legation Councillor hastily, seeking to steer the conversation away from its dangerous course.

‘Five weeks ago, Jan! – For the past week I’ve been staying with our brave old Uncle Barthelsen in Schleswig, and I’ve come here from there to see you, if you’ll put me up for a couple of days; otherwise I’ll go back on board the barque until it has unloaded its cargo.’

“Barthelsen, Captain Barthelsen?” – asked the

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Councillor asked with interest, casting a sharp sidelong glance at his future son-in-law. – “Surely that’s not the same man whom – –[“]

‘The one whom that scoundrel Jörgen Jörrissen had thrown into prison for forty days, against all law and justice, simply because he had drunk to the welfare of his fatherland – something I do every day!’ interrupted the forthright sailor. “Quite right – that’s him, and that is precisely why I’ve made the journey here, to – since my brother is a lawyer and

is employed as a clerk in the records office – to see whether there really is no longer any justice in Copenhagen for the King's German subjects!"

The legation secretary wiped the sweat from his brow and cast only a half-glance at the face of his future father-in-law, which was growing ever longer and more sombre.

'I had not realised until now,' said the Privy Councillor sharply at last, 'that the notorious democrat Barthelsen is one and the same person as this gentleman's relative; otherwise, quite a few things would certainly not have happened.'

'What—didn't Jan defend him, then? His aunt told me she'd written to him specifically and sent him the complaint, didn't she?!'

The aspiring diplomat was on tenterhooks at this unfortunate slip of the tongue. 'The letter must have gone astray!' he stammered at last, trying to give his brother a discreet signal.

But the young ship's captain took no notice. [461]

'Never mind!' he said – 'but surely the newspapers have made enough of a fuss about it, or the journalists would be just as bad and lazy as the whole lot over in Schleswig! But we'll surely have plenty of time to talk about that tomorrow. As for our uncle, Herr Conference Councillor, judging by your speech, he must be the subject of serious slander; for he is as honest a man as any, and enjoys the full respect of his fellow citizens, even if he has never had much luck in other aspects of his life!"

'But he is an agitator for the German Party,' blurted out the Conference Councillor, who, caught up in the conversation, was even beginning to forget the dinner at Countess Danner's. 'He is a democrat!'

'The devil take it – then you'll have to hang us all in Schleswig-Holstein, for we are born democrats,' said the captain with a laugh. 'I am an autocrat only on board my ship, and the devil take anyone who would have it any other way than I do! On land it's a different matter; there the people have their rights – their 'wetten', as we Frisians say – and their privileges, which are, admittedly, rather meagre. Besides, as I've read, you have plenty of democrats here on Zealand yourselves, and you can see from Mr Orla-Lehmann and his friends that they aren't such bad fellows as they're made out to be."

'Yes, but they have a Danish heart and a Danish mindset!' exclaimed the senior official, his eyes flashing, 'and I do not wish to hope that you, even
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where they are in opposition to the Ministry, with the rebels in Kiel and South Jutland, who are bent solely on disobeying their King and Lord and on the dismemberment of the country!"

"I am no great politician, Herr Conferenzrath," said the young captain calmly, "and, moreover, I have been away from my beloved homeland for too long in recent years to be able to judge the state of the political parties adequately. I believe I can say with certainty, however, that it would never even occur to the duchies to demand the fragmentation of the country. Their sole aim is, in complete loyalty to their Duke, to preserve their nationality—which has been protected for more than a millennium—and to remain precisely *'up ewig* ungedeelt'!"

That phrase, already so deeply detested in Copenhagen at the time, which erected such a formidable barrier against the entire policy and aspirations of the Danish Ministry, would – had it been used so inappropriately in this setting – certainly have caused an uproar, had not another power, one that stood even above the national dispute – that of beauty – intervened at that very moment.

It was the beautiful daughter of the house, Miss Edda Hal[l]steen, who, returning unnoticed, had heard the young Frisian's final words and immediately stepped in.

'Are the gentlemen back to politics already?' she said with a smile – 'Indeed, I believe that on both sides of the Belt, one cannot find five men

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minutes on either side of the Belt without them chattering and arguing about nationalities. You see, Mr Hansen, I have overcome my apprehension about even someone as wild as your Suky and have already taken him under my wing, so that he is now busily unpacking his travel bag in your room with his daft English. In return, you must now hurry to your room and make yourself comfortable for the evening; – for, as much as it pains us, we must now whisk your dear brother away, as he must not miss today's invitation to court, for the sake of his entire career and also for mine. And it really is high time. So do your best to pass the evening as pleasantly as you can. You're well known in Copenhagen, aren't you?'

'I was here as a ship's boy and a deckhand!'

'Well,' she said, not without a touch of mockery, which soon gave way to a warmer tone, 'then you must certainly know some parts of the city quite well! But now, farewell until tomorrow, and don't forget to tell me more about that romantic adventure in which you fished such a precious pearl as your Suky out of the Indian Ocean.'

With a calm, friendly smile, she offered him her hand once more; he touched it respectfully, and then turned to her father: 'Your arm, Papa!'

Her authority in the house was so great and so widely recognised that even the Councillor was subject to her. He shrugged his shoulders slightly at the

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day – though the interruption was probably not unwelcome to him either – greeted the young captain politely and allowed his daughter to lead him away.

The brothers followed together – Klaus accompanied the legation secretary hand in hand to the carriage, and the latter took the opportunity to whisper to him on the steps that he should be as cautious as possible in his remarks until he had a chance to brief him in more detail on the mood and circumstances in Copenhagen.

Smiling, the young Frisian nodded in agreement, and as he helped the young lady into the carriage and the carriage rattled away, he was given another friendly greeting, which, however – as he realised when he turned round – he had to share with his Indian servant, who was standing behind him, his whole brown face grinning with delight, and had already attracted the attention of the lovely street urchins. –

'Very nice, Missus, very nice indeed, Sahib Hansa!' said the dark-skinned son of the Moluccas, rubbing his hands together merrily.

Deep in thought, the young sailor climbed the stairs to the room assigned to him.

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The captain had been left alone in his room for a couple of hours, where he was so diligently provided with wine and food that he recognised in this the thoughtful
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strict orders of the young mistress of the house, and in doing so arranged the few belongings he had brought with him from his ship, whilst at the same time reflecting on what he had just experienced. Involuntarily, the image of his brother's beautiful fiancée kept coming to mind, and he had to admit to himself that he had rarely, if ever, seen a more beautiful creature.

When the gas lamps were lit and the evening was already well advanced, he left the house without saying anything further to his Malay servant and strolled through the streets of the old town towards the area of the royal palace, Christiansbourg.

It struck him that the streets were abuzz with an unusually agitated and bustling atmosphere. Numerous groups of people, belonging to the lowest social classes, were moving about and standing in clusters, talking animatedly; and as he was fully fluent in Danish, he could hear them railing against the government. Threats were also repeatedly hurled at the German party, and Klaus Hansen realised that some extraordinary event must have stirred them up. From the speeches—as he paused amongst one of the groups and listened to one of the speakers—the cause became somewhat clear to him.

The Reichstag – that is to say, the chambers for Denmark alone, not for the entire state – had been opened the day before. The two parties, the National-Liberal Party, which at least knew how to conceal its Danisation ambitions more skilfully, and the so-called
'Friends of the Peasants', the 'Common Man's Party', were at loggerheads [466]
opposed one another. The latter, which demanded the destruction of all things German, held the majority in the Volksthing, the second chamber, and an article in the *Dagbladet* that day had attacked them most bitterly. The government-aligned newspaper stated, word for word, regarding the Friends of the Peasants – to whom the former minister Baron Blixen-Finecke belonged: 'They form a mass of insolent, crude fools, led by a handful of half-educated scoundrels, who, following the basest plebeian instincts, are good for nothing but causing vexation to the government and bringing shame upon the country.' A furious uproar amongst the Danish rabble was the response to this language, which was admittedly hardly parliamentary – though by no means unusual in Copenhagen.

He had crossed Kongens-Nytorv and turned towards Större Street when an arm suddenly slipped beneath his own.

'May the devil take me,' said a cheerful voice in good Hamburg dialect,
'If that isn't Captain Hansen of the Clary! – Hey there, shipmate, don't you recognise me?'

The man addressed looked round and saw a weather-beaten sailor's face.

"What – am I seeing right? Captain Dreier from Altona? My brave friend and patron from Singapore!"

‘He’s got plenty to be grateful for,’ remarked the old sea dog. ‘A lad of your calibre needs nothing more than the patronage of his shipowner, and that is assured to any capable seafarer. But allow me, Captain Hansen, to
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introduce a colleague here, Captain Dom Sylvio Macinhos from Oporto, who has just unloaded his cargo. I wish we had some of it to hand.”

The introduction was made in English, and the Portuguese man, who understood it, laughed heartily, revealing his beautiful white teeth.

‘*Por Dios*, Senhor Capitão, that can be remedied! There must be a posada nearby where I’ve left the landlord a cask of genuine Madeira. I’m delighted to make the acquaintance of the Senhor Capitão, and I invite you to share a bottle with me.’

After a brief polite refusal, the suggestion was accepted, all the more willingly as the captain from Altona pointed out that the mood of the roaming rabble was evidently very hostile towards the Germans and could cause them trouble if they were recognised as such.

In the area around the canal that runs alongside Schloßplatz, they turned into a side street and entered one of the seaside taverns where sailors are in the habit of gathering. The Portuguese captain, who was clearly familiar with the place, led them through the crowd of revellers to the far end of the large, hall-like room, greeting sailors along the way whom he knew or who were from his schooner.

The company was a mixed lot from all nations, yet – as Captain Hansen soon noticed – the Swedes and Danes were calling the shots today. People were constantly coming and going, and the restless crowd, which
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were making a racket in the streets and beginning to gather in the castle square to stage all manner of demonstrations, were constantly replenishing their numbers or refreshing themselves in the numerous pubs. Everywhere, the talk was of the opening of the Imperial Council, and the jubilation of the ultra-Danish party was great; in their short-sightedness, they already believed that the elections had secured a victory for democracy over the government.

The Portuguese captain had asked for his wine, and soon the delicious drink glowed in the glasses, whilst the landlord, a retired invalid, bustled to and fro, listening to and passing on the latest news, and encouraging the guests to drink or at least having their orders brought to them. A flute, a harp and a guitar made up the orchestra and struggled, mostly in vain, to make themselves heard above the din.

‘It’s usually quieter and more respectable here,’ remarked the Portuguese captain, ‘otherwise I wouldn’t have brought you gentlemen here. All hell has broken loose in the city today! But at least, Senhor Dreiero, I can settle my debt from yesterday with you here. I’ve just come from the comtoir where I was consigned and have been paid for the cargo, as we intend to set sail the day after tomorrow, before the ice sets in – would you prefer gold or banknotes?”

He had placed a bulging purse on the table, through the mesh of which the gold pieces glinted, and opened his wallet, which was well-stocked with English banknotes, and rummaged through it.
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‘There would have been time until tomorrow, Captain,’ said the man from Altona. ‘But since you’re here anyway, we might as well settle it. You received a barrel of salted tongues and two barrels of smoked meat – that comes to 270 marks in cash. Give me half in gold and half in notes; that’s what I can make the best use of, rather than those damned Danish coins!” The Portuguese man counted out the money. ‘Senhor,’ said the Frisian in Spanish, which he assumed the other man understood, ‘you should avoid showing so much cash about in these parts. You know that even amongst the tar-jackets there’s enough of the dregs of society, and that confiscated look you’ve just seen on his shoulders…“

The Portuguese man turned round. “Ah, *por Dios! Pedro Aveiros*, my first mate! I’m delighted to see you, and who on earth have you brought with you? That lad looks as though he could devour our entire schooner in a single bite!”

The man he was speaking of was of gigantic stature even amongst the burly sons of the North, and towered over the Frisian captain by a good half a head’s length. His long body, though not broad, was sinewy, and his long arms—which, given his size, looked utterly misshapen, with hands as wide as plates at their ends—bore witness to great strength. His completely beardless face, which was far too small for such a body, looked shrivelled and eerie, and his small, reddish eyes had a vicious, animal-like
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glint. Almost white, flax-like hair hung down long around his head.

His companion, the Portuguese helmsman, was the very opposite in both appearance and character. He was small and slight, yet possessed great southern agility, and his black, sharp eyes sparkled like those of a rat. He might have been some thirty years old, judging by his tanned face, framed by a thick black beard and marked by several deep wrinkles.

‘May the Blessed Virgin be with you, Senhor Kapitano!’ greeted the helmsman. ‘I hoped to find you here, which is why I’ve brought a mate along who’s keen to take the place of the unfortunate Perez and see for himself what life is like in the orange groves of Portugal. The lad can lift five hundred pounds all by himself!’

“Who is this man?”

‘He’s an Icelander, Senhor, and his name is *Jökul!* He’s only ever served on whaling ships.’ The captain sized up the giant, who was staring intently at the
. He didn’t seem to take much of a liking to the man, but it was difficult to find capable sailors, so he decided to take him on. He called for a fresh bottle, poured both men a full glass, and then said: ‘Thank you, Helmsman Aveiros! I shall be sleeping on board the Santa Lucia tonight, and the man may report to me first thing tomorrow morning to finalise his contract!”
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The musicians had just struck up the now-famous national anthem, ‘The Brave Land Soldier’, over the raucous clamour of a rowdy crowd carousing at the front of the hall, and the rabble were roaring along to the beat with their hands and feet. The woman carrying the guitar sang the familiar song in the shrill voice typical of these pub virtuosos:

‘When I’m called to march,
when I’m called to march,
My girl wants to come too, yes, my
girl wants to come too. My darling,
that won’t do; now it’s time to get
going!
And if no bullet strikes me, I’ll be back again. Yes, were the enemy
not near, I’d not hesitate to go to war;
But all the Danish girls are counting on me now; And so I’ll
fight as a brave soldier!
Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!’

Here comes the German, here
comes the German, I lament to
everyone,
Yes, I’ll lament to everyone.
To Peter and to Paul
He even says: ‘You’re lazy!’
And if you tell him off in Danish, he’ll say straight away: ‘Shut up!’ To those who
speak many languages, it makes no difference,
But, by Jove! there are some who can’t even manage two! And so I’ll
fight as a brave soldier!
Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!

I know of the Dannebrog, I
know of the Dannebrog,

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It fell from high in the
heavens, yes, it fell from high
in the heavens. It flutters over
the sea and before the soldiers,
And no other flag is named for itself as it is,
They have mocked and reviled it with mad fury, – No, our
flag is far too old and far too good for that!
And so I will fight as a brave soldier of my country!
Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!’

The crowd cheered along to the chorus every time. The Icelander’s vacant eyes had strangely come to life during the song; a wild excitement seemed to come over him and he waved his glass as if possessed.

‘Hurrah! Hurrah! Down with the government and the damned Tydskers![1]

“That bloke’s a fool!” said the Frisian with disgust to his older comrade. “That rabble’s rampaging like mad. But I’ll bet that with my eight brave lads from the Halligen, I could drive the whole lot out!”

[1] Germans.

It was as though chance were answering the wish, for just as the last verse of the ‘brave country soldiers’ was bellowed out, a new swarm of guests burst through the door and immediately the familiar Low German sounds rang out at the bar.

A raucous triple ‘Hurräh!’ brought the defiant song to a close. The tall Icelander leapt onto a bench and brandished a bottle of rum.

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‘Long live the Dannebrog! Down with those German dogs!’

Amidst the roar of the drunks, a shrill harp chord suddenly cut through.

Then a clear, not unpleasing alto voice rose up and gave voice to the much-maligned national anthem of the German duchies:

> ‘Schleswig-Holstein, embraced by the sea, a steadfast
> guardian of German customs,
> Remain true to what was hard-won,
> Until dawn breaks after a dark night!
> Schleswig-Holstein, of the same stock, do not
> falter, my fatherland!

It was – although the tavern was otherwise mostly frequented by German and foreign sailors, and the landlord himself was a native of Schleswig – under the prevailing circumstances, and particularly on this evening, such an unheard-of act of daring to sing this song that it had to be regarded as either a mad defiance or an act of the most magnanimous national sentiment; and indeed, the effect was so surprising that for a few moments both sides fell silent in astonishment, whilst the singer, seated behind her harp, continued in a firm, clear voice.

But then the storm broke out all the more fiercely. A frenzied round of applause from the Germans present rewarded the daring harpist; even the two captains at the far end of the room joined in unreservedly.

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Yet this applause was immediately met with a storm of the wildest curses and invectives.

The Danes and Swedes present, most of whom were already drunk or at least in a highly agitated state, did not consider that they had provoked the demonstration in the first place and saw in the singing of this song—which was strictly frowned upon by the ruling authorities in the capital—a brazen mockery. Their fury knew no bounds; tables and benches were overturned, and no fewer than ten frenzied men charged towards the small stage with fists raised in a threatening gesture, whilst the singer carried on with her song unperturbed, even though her two companions were doing their utmost to prevent her from continuing in her recklessness.

Captain Hansen had, until then, paid no attention whatsoever to the musical trio—one man and two women—and had not even spared them a glance, as the character of these virtuosos who roamed the pubs was all too familiar and distasteful to him to take any notice of them. However, the singer’s remarkable courage—her fresh, resonant voice suggesting her youth—interested him so much that he rose, filled with sympathy, to catch a glimpse of her.

The thick cloud of tobacco smoke and the tall harp standing in front of the singer, however, prevented him from making out her face. He saw only the men furiously hurling the most vile insults at the poor woman, and heard the shrill sound of the harp as it was struck by
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the fists of the fierce Icelander and was swung high into the air, as if the heavy instrument were meant to shatter its mistress.

‘Whore! German whore! Beat that scum to death! Throw her into the water!’

In an instant, all calm and caution had vanished from the young captain. With a thunderous ‘Halt!’, he leapt over the nearest table, shoved the Icelander aside and stood in front of the girl.

‘Stop, I say! Come here to me, shipmates! No one is to lay a hand on the girl! Give the harp back, man! You’ve heard your song; now let us sing ours!’

His voice rang out so powerfully and commandingly, and his figure looked so menacing, that the attackers instinctively halted. The German sailors let out a merry
‘Hurrah!’ and hurried to the side of their leader, who had appeared so suddenly.

“Hand over the harp, I say, man!”

The giant Icelander glared at him. He was still holding the heavy instrument aloft. Suddenly he made a move, and before the captain or anyone else could stop him, he smashed the harp onto the floor, shattering it into a hundred pieces.

“There you have it! And now it’s your turn!”

The half-beastly savage wrenched the short sailor’s knife—which he carried in a sheath of whale skin on a cord round his neck—from its sheath, took it
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between his teeth and then thrust out both clenched fists to lunge at his opponent, who stood his ground, waiting for him with cold-blooded composure, even though he was unarmed and refused to draw his own knife from his side pocket.

However bitterly the two sides were pitted against one another, a cry of horror rang out; for everyone believed the brave young man to be lost, or at least expected a fierce and bloody struggle.

At that very moment, the hand of the Portuguese helmsman, whose small figure had slipped beneath the Icelander’s arm, reached for the horn hilt of the knife and pulled it from his mouth, whilst the Portuguese whispered a few words to the giant.

Whatever their content may have been, the effect was striking and immediate.

The Icelander let his arms drop, straightened up again and cast a glance at his opponent, much like a vicious bull terrier might look at a mighty Great Dane that is contesting his prey, yet which he dares not attack.

Then he turned round, pushed the overturned chairs aside, and uttered just two words:

‘A drink!’

The Portuguese handed him a fresh bottle of rum and, with a telling and farewell gesture, took his captain—who had stepped closer—by the arm to lead him away.

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This outcome was so unexpected, so utterly contrary to what everyone had considered inevitable, that it became almost laughable, and both parties, despite their agitation, burst into loud laughter.

Amidst this mockery, the giant was led out of the taproom by his diminutive companion.

Captain Dreier, who had approached with concern alongside his Portuguese friend when the wild scene had first begun so menacingly, now took his young colleague's hand.

'That was very kind of you, Captain Hansen,' he said warmly, 'but that is enough, and it would be best if we were to leave now. Let us take the girl with us; for the poor thing, even though she sang from the heart, might still end up paying dearly for her carelessness, and has already suffered a heavy loss. Therefore, let us take her under our protection until she is safe.

Only now did the young Frisian feel compelled to turn round and look at the ballad singer, whose life he had probably saved.

The girl was kneeling on the ground behind him, gathering up the pieces of his shattered harp without any visible agitation from the recent terror, but with a serious, indeed sombre, expression on her face.

Just as the young Frisian turned round, she raised her head and looked up at him.

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Klaus Hansen recoiled in shock and struggled to stifle a cry.

The woman kneeling before him, who had just sung the German song, who had barely escaped the threat of death, – was none other than – dressed only in a plain, shabby garment instead of the elegant ball gown in which he had admired her but a few hours earlier – the proud Danish woman *Edda Hal[l]steen*, his brother's bride!

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